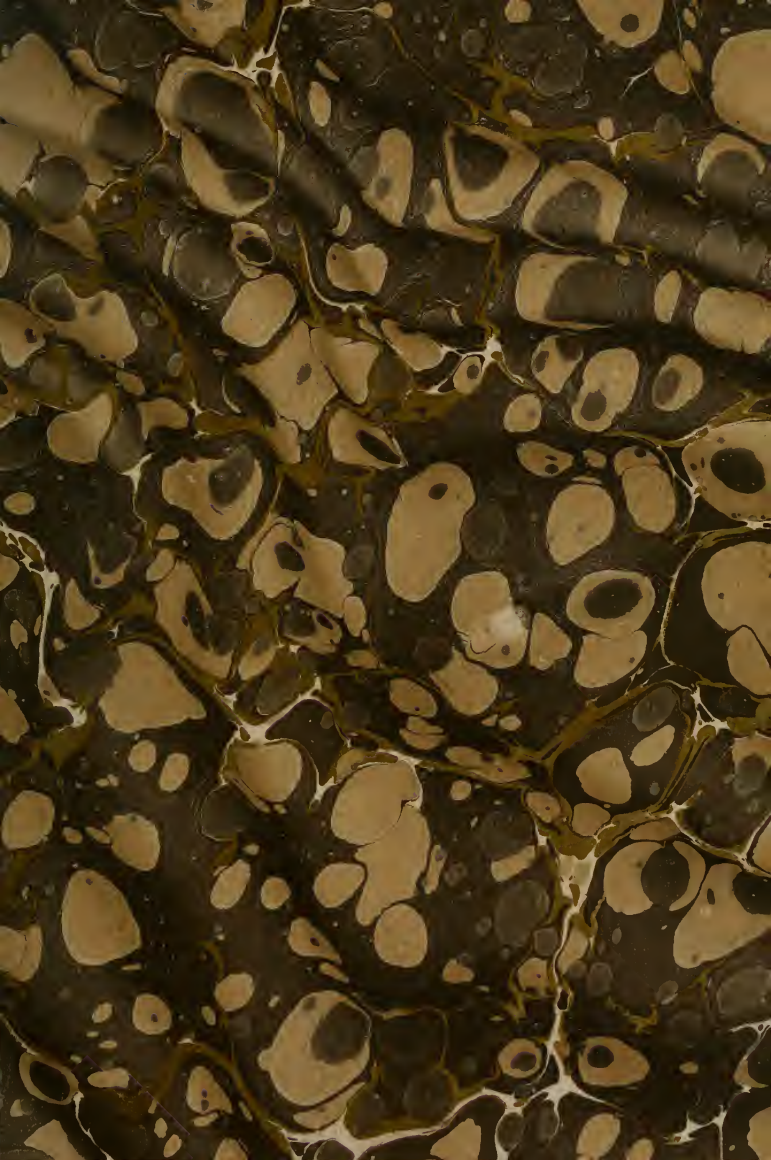


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A HOUSE
DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF

BY
MRS OLIPHANT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLXXXVI

1886

A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF.



CHAPTER I.

THE day was warm, and there was no shade; out of the olive woods which they had left behind, and where all was soft coolness and freshness, they had emerged into a piece of road widened and perfected by recent improvements till it was as shelterless as a broad street. High walls on one side clothed with the green clinging trails of the mesembryanthemum, with palm-trees towering above, but throwing no shadow below; on the other a low house or two, and more garden walls, leading in a broad curve to the little old walled town, its campanile rising up over the clustered roofs, in

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which was their home. They had fifteen minutes or more of dazzling sunshine before them ere they could reach any point of shelter.

Ten minutes, or even five, would have been enough for Frances. She could have run along, had she been alone, as like a bird as any human creature could be, being so light and swift and young. But it was very different with her father. He walked but slowly at the best of times; and in the face of the sun at noon, what was to be expected of him? It was part of the strange contrariety of fate, which was against him in whatever he attempted, small or great, that it should be just here, in this broad, open, unavoidable path, that he encountered one of those parties which always made him wroth, and which usually he managed to keep clear of with such dexterity—an English family from one of the hotels.

Tourists from the hotels are always objectionable to residents in a place. Even when the residents are themselves strangers—perhaps, indeed, all the more from that fact—the chance visitors who come to stare and gape at those scenes which the others have appropriated and

taken possession of, are insufferable. Mr Waring had lived in the old town of Bordighera for a great number of years. He had seen the Marina and the line of hotels on the beach created, and he had watched the travellers arriving to take possession of them—the sick people, and the people who were not sick. He had denounced the invasion unceasingly, and with vehemence; he had never consented to it. The Italians about might be complacent, thinking of the enrichment of the neighbourhood, and of what was good for trade, as these prosaic people do; but the English colonist on the Punto could not put up with it. And to be met here, on his return from his walk, by an unblushing band about whom there could be no mistake, was very hard to bear. He had to walk along exposed to the fire of all their unabashed and curious glances, to walk slowly, to miss none, from that of the stout mother to that of the slim governess. In the rear of the party came the papa, a portly Saxon, of the class which, if comparisons could be thought of in so broad and general a sentiment, Mr Waring disliked worst of all—a big

man, a rosy man, a fat man, in large easy morning clothes, with a big white umbrella over his head. This last member of the family came at some distance behind the rest. He did not like the sun, though he had been persuaded to leave England in search of it. He was very warm, moist, and in a state of general relaxation, his tidy necktie coming loose, his gloves only half on, his waistcoat partially unbuttoned. It was March, when no doubt a good genuine east wind was blowing at home. At that moment this traveller almost regretted the east wind.

The Warings were going up-hill towards their abode: the slope was gentle enough, yet it added to the slowness of Mr Waring's pace. All the English party had stared at him, as is the habit of English parties; and indeed he and his daughter were not unworthy of a stare. But all these gazes came with a cumulation of curiosity to widen the stare of the last comer, who had, besides, twenty or thirty yards of vacancy in which the indignant resident was fully exposed to his view. Little Frances, who was English enough to stare too, though in a

gentlewomanly way, saw a change gradually come, as he gazed, over the face of the stranger. His eyebrows rose up bushy and arched with surprise; his eyelids puckered with the intentness of his stare; his lips dropped apart. Then he came suddenly to a stand-still, and gasped forth the word "WARING!" in tones of surprise to which capital letters can give but faint expression.

Mr Waring, struck by this exclamation as by a bullet, paused too, as with something of that inclination to turn round which is said to be produced by a sudden hit. He put up his hand momentarily, as if to pull down his broad-brimmed hat over his brows. But in the end he did neither. He stood and faced the stranger with angry energy. "Well?" he said.

"Dear me! who could have thought of seeing you here? Let me call my wife. She will be delighted. Mary! Why, I thought you had gone to the East. I thought you had disappeared altogether. And so did everybody. And what a long time it is, to be sure! You look as if you had forgotten me."

"I have," said the other, with a supercilious gaze, perusing the large figure from top to toe.

"Oh come, Waring! Why—Mannering; you can't have forgotten Mannering, a fellow that stuck by you all through. Dear, how it brings up everything, seeing you again! Why, it must be a dozen years ago. And what have you been doing all this time? Wandering over the face of the earth, I suppose, in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, since nobody has ever fallen in with you before."

"I am something of an invalid," said Waring. "I fear I cannot stand in the sun to answer so many questions. And my movements are of no importance to any one but myself."

"Don't be so misanthropical," said the stranger in his large round voice. "You always had a turn that way. And I don't wonder if you are soured—any fellow would be soured. Won't you say a word to Mary? She's looking back, wondering with all her might what new acquaintance I've found out here, never thinking it's an old friend. Hillo, Mary! What's the matter? Don't you want to see her? Why, man alive, don't be so bitter! She and I have

always stuck up for you ; through thick and thin, we've stuck up for you. Eh ! can't stand any longer ? Well, it is hot, isn't it ? There's no variety in this confounded climate. Come to the hotel, then—the Victoria, down there."

Waring had passed his interrogator, and was already at some distance, while the other, breathless, called after him. He ended, affronted, by another discharge of musketry, which hit the fugitive in the rear. "I suppose," the indiscreet inquirer demanded, breathlessly, "that's the little girl?"

Frances had followed with great but silent curiosity this strange conversation. She had not interposed in any way, but she had stood close by her father's side, drinking in every word with keen ears and eyes. She had heard and seen many strange things, but never an encounter like this ; and her eagerness to know what it meant was great ; but she dared not linger a moment after her father's rapid movement of the hand, and the longer stride than usual, which was all the increase of speed he was capable of. As she had stood still by his side without a question, she now went on, very

much as if she had been a delicate little piece of machinery of which he had touched the spring. That was not at all the character of Frances Waring; but to judge by her movements while at her father's side, an outside observer might have thought so. She had never offered any resistance to any impulse from him in her whole life; indeed it would have seemed to her an impossibility to do so. But these impulses concerned the outside of her life only. She went along by his side with the movement of a swift creature restrained to the pace of a very slow one, but making neither protest nor remark. And neither did she ask any explanation, though she cast many a stolen glance at him as they pursued their way. And for his part, he said nothing. The heat of the sun, the annoyance of being thus interrupted, were enough to account for that.

This broad bit of sunny road which lay between them and the shelter of their home had been made by one of those too progressive municipalities, thirsting for English visitors and tourists in general, who fill with hatred and horror the old residents in Italy; and after it

followed a succession of stony stairs more congenial to the locality, by which, under old archways and through narrow alleys, you got at last to the wider centre of the town, a broad stony piazza, under the shadow of the Bell Tower, the characteristic campanile which was the landmark of the place. Except on one side of the piazza, all here was in grateful shade. Waring's stern face softened a little when he came into these cool and almost deserted streets: here and there was a woman at a doorway, an old man in the deep shadow of an open shop or booth unguarded by any window, two or three girls filling their pitchers at the well, but no intrusive tourists or passengers of any kind to break the noonday stillness. The pair went slowly through the little town, and emerged by another old gateway, on the farther side, where the blue Mediterranean, with all its wonderful shades of colour, and line after line of headland cutting down into those ethereal tints, stretched out before them, ending in the haze of the Ligurian mountains. The scene was enough to take away the breath of one unaccustomed to that blaze of wonderful light, and all the de-

lightful accidents of those purple hills. But this pair were too familiarly acquainted with every line to make any pause. They turned round the sunny height from the gateway, and entered by a deep small door sunk in the wall, which stood high like a great rampart rising from the Punto. This was the outer wall of the palace of the lord of the town, still called *the Palazzo at Bordighera*. Every large house is a palace in Italy; but the pretensions of this were well founded. The little door by which they entered had been an opening of modern and peaceful times, the state entrance being through a great doorway and court on the inner side. The deep outer wall was pierced by windows, only at the height of the second storey on the sea side, so that the great marble stair up which Waring toiled slowly was very long and fatiguing, as if it led to a mountain-top. He reached his rooms breathless, and going in through antechamber and corridor, threw himself into the depths of a large but upright chair. There were no signs of luxury about. It was not one of those hermitages of culture and ease which English recluses make for themselves in

the most unlikely places. It was more like a real hermitage; or, to speak more simply, it was like, what it really was, an apartment in an old Italian house, in a rustic castle, furnished and provided as such a place, in the possession of its natural inhabitants, would be.

The Palazzo was subdivided into a number of habitations, of which the apartment of the Englishman was the most important. It was composed of a suite of rooms facing to the sea, and commanding the entire circuit of the sun; for the windows on one side were to the east, and at the other the apartment ended in a large loggia, commanding the west and all the glorious sunsets accomplished there. We Northerners, who have but a limited enjoyment of the sun, show often a strange indifference to him in the sites and situations of our houses; but in Italy it is well known that where the sun does not go the doctor goes, and much more regard is shown to the aspect of the house.

The Warings at the worst of that genial climate had little occasion for fire; they had but to follow the centre of light when he

glided out of one room to fling himself more abundantly into another. The Punto is always full in the cheerful rays. It commands everything—air and sea, and the mountains and all their thousand effects of light and shade; and the Palazzo stands boldly out upon this the most prominent point in the landscape, with the houses of the little town withdrawing on a dozen different levels behind. In the warlike days when no point of vantage which a pirate could seize upon was left undefended or assailable, it is probable that there was no loggia from which to watch the western illuminations. But peace has been so long on the Riviera that the loggia too was antique, the parapet crumbling and grey. It opened from a large room, very lofty, and with much faded decoration on the upper walls and roof, which was the *salone* or drawing-room, beyond which was an ante-room, then a sort of library, a dining-room, a succession of bed-chambers; much space, little furniture, sunshine and air unlimited, and a view from every window which it was worth living to be able to look out upon night and day. This, however, at the moment of which

we write, was shut out all along the line, the green *persiani* being closed, and nothing open but the loggia, which was still cool and in the shade. The rooms lay in a soft green twilight, cool and fresh; the doors were open from one to another, affording a long vista of picturesque glimpses.

From where Waring had thrown himself down to rest, he looked straight through the apartment, over the faded formality of the ante-room with its large old chairs, which were never moved from their place, across his own library, in which there was a glimmer of vellum binding and old gilding, to the table with its white tablecloth, laid out for breakfast in the eating-room. The quiet soothed him after a while, and perhaps the evident preparations for his meal, the large and rotund flask of Chianti which Domenico was placing on the table, the vision of another figure behind Domenico with a delicate dish of mayonnaise in her hands. He could distinguish that it was a mayonnaise, and his angry spirit calmed down. Noon began to chime from the campanile, and Frances came in without her hat and with the eagerness subdued in her

eyes. "Breakfast is ready, papa," she said. She had that look of knowing nothing and guessing nothing beyond what lies on the surface, which so many women have.

She was scarcely to be called a woman, not only because of being so young, but of being so small, so slim, so light, with such a tiny figure, that a stronger breeze than usual would, one could not help thinking, blow her away. Her father was very tall, which made her tiny size the more remarkable. She was not beautiful—few people are to the positive degree; but she had the prettiness of youth, of round soft contour, and peach-like skin, and clear eyes. Her hair was light brown, her eyes dark brown, neither very remarkable; her features small and clearly cut, as was her figure, no slovenliness or want of finish about any line. All this pleasing exterior was very simple and easily comprehended, and had but little to do with her, the real Frances, who was not so easy to understand. She had two faces, although there was in her no guile. She had the countenance she now wore, as it were for daily use—a countenance without expression, like a

sunny cheerful morning in which there is neither care nor fear—the countenance of a girl calling papa to breakfast, very punctual, determined that nobody should reproach her as being half of a minute late, or having a hair or a ribbon a hair's-breadth out of place. That such a girl should have ever suspected anything, feared anything—except perhaps gently that the mayonnaise was not to papa's taste—was beyond the range of possibilities; or that she should be acquainted with anything in life beyond the simple routine of regular hours and habits, the sweet and gentle bond of the ordinary, which is the best rule of young lives.

Frances Waring had sometimes another face. That profile of hers was not so clearly cut for nothing; nor were her eyes so lucid only to perceive the outside of existence. In her room, during the few minutes she spent there, she had looked at herself in her old-fashioned dim glass, and seen a different creature. But what that was, or how it was, must show itself farther on. She led the way into the dining-room, the trimmest composed little figure, all England embodied—though she scarcely remembered

England—in the self-restrained and modest toilet of a little girl accustomed to be cared for by women well instructed in the niceties of feminine costume; and yet she had never had any one to take counsel with except an Italian maid-of-all-work, who loved the brightest primitive colours, as became her race. Frances knew so few English people that she had not even the admiration of surprise at her success. Those she did know took it for granted that she got her pretty sober suits, her simple unelaborate dresses, from some very excellent dressmaker at “home,” not knowing that she did not know what home was.

Her father followed her, as different a figure as imagination could suggest. He was very tall, very thin, with long legs and stooping shoulders, his hair in limp locks, his shirt-collar open, a velvet coat—looking as entirely adapted to the locality, the conventional right man in the right place, as she was not the conventional woman. A gloomy look, which was habitual to him, a fretful longitudinal pucker in his forehead, the hollow lines of ill health in his cheeks, disguised the fact that he was, or had been, a

handsome man; just as his extreme spareness and thinness made it difficult to believe that he had also been a very powerful one. Nor was he at all old, save in the very young eyes of his daughter, to whom forty-five was venerable. He might have been an artist or a poet of a misanthropical turn of mind; though, when a man has chronic asthma, misanthropy is unnecessary to explain his look of pain, and fatigue, and disgust with the outside world. He walked languidly, his shoulders up to his ears, and followed Frances to the table, and sat down with that air of dissatisfaction which takes the comfort out of everything. Frances either was inaccessible to this kind of discomfort, or so accustomed to it that she did not feel it. She sat serenely opposite to him, and talked of indifferent things.

"Don't take the mayonnaise, if you don't like it, papa; there is something else coming that will perhaps be better. Mariuccia does not at all pride herself upon her mayonnaise."

"Mariuccia knows very little about it; she has not even the sense to know what she can do best." He took a little more of the dish,

partly out of contradiction, which was the result which Frances hoped.

"The lettuce is so crisp and young, that makes it a little better," she said, with the air of a connoisseur.

"A little better is not the word; it is very good," he said, fretfully; then added with a slight sigh, "Everything is better for being young."

"Except people, I know. Why does young mean good with vegetables and everything else, and silly only when it is applied to people?—though it can't be helped, I know."

"That is one of your metaphysical questions," he said, with a slight softening of his tone. "Perhaps because of human jealousy. We all like to discredit what we haven't got, and most people you see are no longer young."

"Oh, do you think so, papa? I think there are more young people than old people."

"I suppose you are right, Fan; but they don't count for so much, in the way of opinion at least. What has called forth these sage remarks?"

"Only the lettuce," she said, with a laugh.

Then, after a pause, "For instance, there were six or seven children in the party we met to-day, and only two parents."

"There are seldom more than two parents, my dear."

She had not looked up when she made this careless little speech, and yet there was a purpose in it, and a good deal of keen observation through her drooped eyelashes. She received his reply with a little laugh. "I did not mean that, papa; but that six or seven are a great deal more than two, which of course you will laugh at me for saying. I suppose they were all English?"

"I suppose so. The father—if he was the father—certainly was English."

"And you knew him, papa?"

"He knew me, which is a different thing."

Then there was a little pause. The conversation between the father and daughter was apt to run in broken periods. He very seldom originated anything. When she found a subject upon which she could interest him, he would reply, to a certain limit, and then the talk would drop. He was himself a very silent man,

requiring no outlet of conversation ; and when he refused to be interested, it was a task too hard for Frances to lead him into speech. She on her side was full of a thousand unsatisfied curiosities, which for the most part were buried in her own bosom. In the meantime Domenico made the circle of the table with the new dish, and his step and a question or two from his master were all the remarks that accompanied the meal. Mr Waring was something of a *gourmet*, but at the same time he was very temperate—a conjunction which is favourable to fine eating. His table was delicately furnished with dishes almost infinitesimal in quantity, but superlative in quality ; and he ate his dainty light repast with gravity and slowly, as a man performs what he feels to be one of the most important functions of his life.

“Tell Mariuccia that a few drops from a fresh lemon would have improved this *ragoût*—but a very fresh lemon.”

“Yes, Excellency, *freschissimo*,” said Domenico, with solemnity.

In the household generally, nothing was so important as the second breakfast, except, in-

deed, the dinner, which was the climax of the day. The gravity of all concerned, the little solemn movement round the white-covered table in the still soft shade of the atmosphere, with those green *persiani* shutting out all the sunshine, and the brown old walls, bare of any decoration, throwing up the group, made a curious picture. The walls were quite bare, the floor brown and polished, with only a square of carpet round the table; but the roof and cornices were gilt and painted with tarnished gilding and half-obliterated pictures. Opposite to Frances was a blurred figure of a cherub with a finger on his lip. She looked up at this faint image as she had done a hundred times, and was silent. He seemed to command the group, hovering over it like a little tutelary god.

CHAPTER II.

THE Warings had been settled at Bordighera almost as long as Frances could remember. She had known no other way of living than that which could be carried on under the painted roofs in the Palazzo, nor any other domestic management than that of Domenico and Mariuccia. She herself had been brought up by the latter, who had taught her to knit stockings and to make lace of a coarse kind, and also how to spare and save, and watch every detail of the *spese*—the weekly or daily accounts—with an anxious eye. Beyond this, Frances had received very little education : her father had taught her fitfully to read and write after a sort ; and he had taught her to draw, for which she had a little faculty—that is to say, she had made little sketches of all the points of view round about,

which, if they were not very great in art, amused her, and made her feel that there was something she could do. Indeed, so far as doing went, she had a good deal of knowledge. She could mend very neatly—so neatly, that her darn or her patch was almost an ornament. She was indeed neat in everything, by instinct, without being taught. The consequence was, that her life was very full of occupation, and her time never hung heavy on her hands. At eighteen, indeed, it may be doubted whether time ever does hang heavy on a girl's hands. It is when ten years or so of additional life have passed over her head, bringing her no more important occupations than those which are pleasant and appropriate to early youth, that she begins to feel her disabilities ; but fortunately, that is a period of existence with which at the present moment we have nothing to do.

Her father, who was not fifty yet, had been a young man when he came to this strange seclusion. Why he should have chosen Bordighera, no one had taken the trouble to inquire. He came when it was a little town on the spur of the hill, without either hotels or tourists, or

at least very few of these articles—like many other little towns which are perched on little platforms among the olive woods all over that lovely country. The place had commended itself to him because it was so completely out of the way. And then it was very cheap, simple, and primitive. He was not, however, by any means a primitive-minded man; and when he took Domenico and Mariuccia into his service, it was for a year or two an interest in his life to train them to everything that was the reverse of their own natural primitive ways. Mariuccia had a little native instinct for cookery such as is not unusual among the Latin races, and which her master trained into all the sophistications of a *cordón bleu*. And Domenico had that lively desire to serve his padrone “hand and foot,” as English servants say, and do everything for him, which comes natural to an amiable Italian eager to please. Both of them had been encouraged and trained to carry out these inclinations. Mr Waring was difficult to please. He wanted attendance continually. He would not tolerate a speck of dust anywhere, or any carelessness of service; but otherwise he was not a bad master.

He left them many independences, which suited them, and never objected to that appropriation to themselves of his house as theirs, and assertion of themselves as an important part of the family, which is the natural result of a long service. Frances grew up accordingly in franker intimacy with the honest couple than is usual in English households. There was nothing they would not have done for the Signorina—starve for her, scrape and pinch for her, die for her if need had been; and in the meantime, while there was no need for service more heroic, correct her, and improve her mind, and set her faults before her with simplicity. Her faults were small, it is true, but zealous Love did not omit to find many out.

Mr Waring painted a little, and was disposed to call himself an artist; and he read a great deal, or was supposed to do so, in the library, which formed one of the set of rooms, among the old books in vellum, which took a great deal of reading. A little old public library existing in another little town farther up among the hills, gave him an excuse, if it was not anything more, for a great deal of what he called work.

There were some manuscripts and a number of old editions laid up in this curious little hermitage of learning, from which the few people who knew him believed he was going some day to compile or collect something of importance. The people who knew him were very few. An old clergyman, who had been a colonial chaplain all his life, and now "took the service" in the bare little room which served as an English church, was the chief of his acquaintances. This gentleman had an old wife and a middle-aged daughter, who furnished something like society for Frances. Another associate was an old Indian officer, much battered by wounds, liver, and disappointment, who, systematically neglected by the authorities (as he thought), and finding himself a nobody in the home to which he had looked forward for so many years, had retired in disgust, and built himself a little house, surrounded with palms, which reminded him of India, and full in the rays of the sun, which kept off his neuralgia. He, too, had a wife, whose constant correspondence with her numerous children occupied her mind and thoughts, and who liked Frances because she

never tired of hearing stories of those absent sons and daughters. They saw a good deal of each other, these three resident families, and reminded each other from time to time that there was such a thing as society.

In summer they disappeared—sometimes to places higher up among the hills, sometimes to Switzerland or the Tyrol, sometimes “home.” They all said home, though neither the Durants nor the Gaunts knew much of England, and though they could never say enough in disparagement of its grey skies and cold winds. But the Warings never went “home.” Frances, who was entirely without knowledge or associations with her native country, used the word from time to time because she heard Tasie Durant or Mrs Gaunt do so; but her father never spoke of England, nor of any possible return, nor of any district in England as that to which he belonged. It escaped him at times that he had seen something of society a dozen or fifteen years before this date; but otherwise, nothing was known about his past life. It was not a thing that was much discussed, for the intercourse in which he lived with his neigh-

bours was not intimate, nor was there any particular reason why he should enter upon his own history; but now and then it would be remarked by one or another that nobody knew anything of his antecedents. "What's your county, Waring?" General Gaunt had once asked; and the other had answered with a languid smile, "I have no county," without the least attempt to explain. The old general, in spite of himself, had apologised, he did not know why; but still no information was given. And Waring did not look like a man who had no county. His thin long figure had an aristocratic air. He knew about horses, and dogs, and country-gentleman sort of subjects. It was impossible that he should turn out to be a shopkeeper's son, or a *bourgeois* of any kind. However, as has been said, the English residents did not give themselves much trouble about the matter. There was not enough of them to get up a little parochial society, like that which flourishes in so many English colonies, gossiping with the best, and forging anew for themselves those chains of a small community which everybody pretends to hate.

In the afternoon of the day on which the encounter recorded in the previous chapter had taken place, Frances sat in the loggia alone at her work. She was busy with her drawing—a very elaborate study of palm-trees, which she was making from a cluster of those trees which were visible from where she sat. A loggia is something more than a balcony; it is like a room with the outer wall or walls taken away. This one was as large as the big *salone* out of which it opened, and had therefore room for changes of position as the sun changed. Though it faced the west, there was always a shady corner at one end or the other. It was the favourite place in which Frances carried on all her occupations—where her father came to watch the sunset—where she had tea, with that instinct of English habit and tradition which she possessed without knowing how. Mr Waring did not much care for her tea, except now and then in a fitful way; and Mariuccia thought it medicine. But it pleased Frances to have the little table set out with two or three old china cups which did not match, and a small silver teapot, which was one of the very

few articles of value in the house. Very rarely, not once in a month, had she any occasion for these cups; but yet, such a chance did occur at long intervals; and in the meantime, with a pleasure not much less infantine, but much more wistful than that with which she had played at having a tea-party seven or eight years before, she set out her little table now.

She was seated with her drawing materials on one table and the tea on another, in the stillness of the afternoon, looking out upon the mountains and the sea. No; she was doing nothing of the sort. She was looking with all her might at the clump of palm-trees within the garden of the villa, which lay low down at her feet between her and the sunset. She was not indifferent to the sunset. She had an admiration, which even the humblest art-training quickens, for the long range of coast, with its innumerable ridges running down from the sky to the sea, in every variety of gnarled edge, and gentle slope, and precipice; and for the amazing blue of the water, with its ribbon-edge of paler colours, and the deep royal purple of the broad surface, and the white sails thrown

up against it, and the white foam that turned up the edges of every little wave. But in the meantime she was not thinking of them, nor of the infinitely varied lines of the mountains, or the specks of towns, each with its campanile shining in the sun, which gave character to the scene; but of the palms on which her attention was fixed, and which, however beautiful they sound, or even look, are apt to get very spiky in a drawing, and so often will not "come" at all. She was full of fervour in her work, which had got to such a pitch of impossibility that her lips were dry and wide apart from the strain of excitement with which she struggled with her subject, when the bell tinkled where it hung outside upon the stairs, sending a little jar through all the Palazzo, where bells were very uncommon; and presently Tasie Durant, pushing open the door of the *salone*, with a breathless little "Permesso?" came out upon the loggia in her usual state of haste, and with half-a-dozen small books tumbling out of her hand.

"Never mind, dear; they are only books for the Sunday-school. Don't you know we had

twelve last Sunday? Twelve!—think!—when I have thought it quite large and extensive to have five. I never was more pleased. I am getting up a little library for them like they have at home. It is so nice to have everything like they have at home.”

“Like what?” said Frances, though she had no education.

“Like they have—well, if you are so particular, the same as they have at home. There were three of one family—think! Not little nobodies, but ladies and gentlemen. It is so nice of people not just poor people, people of education, to send their children to the Sunday-school.”

“New people?” said Frances.

“Yes; tourists, I suppose. You all scoff at the tourists; but I think it is very good for the place, and so pleasant for us to see a new face from time to time. Why should they all go to Mentone? Mentone is so towny, quite a big place. And papa says that in his time Nice was everything, and that nobody had ever heard of Mentone.”

“Who are the new people, Tasie?” Frances asked.

“They are a large family—that is all I know; not likely to settle, more’s the pity. Oh no. Quite *well* people, not even a delicate child,” said Miss Durant, regretfully; “and such a nice domestic family, always walking about together. Father and mother, and governess and six children. They must be very well off, too, or they could not travel like that, such a lot of them, and nurses—and I think I heard, a courier too.” This, Miss Durant said in a tone of some emotion; for the place, as has been said, was just beginning to be known, and the people who came as yet were but pioneers.

“I have seen them. I wonder who they are. My father——” said Frances; and then stopped, and held her head on one side, to contemplate the effect of the last touches on her drawing; but this was in reality because it suddenly occurred to her that to publish her father’s acquaintance with the stranger might be unwise.

“Your father?” said Tasie. “Did he take any notice of them? I thought he never took any notice of tourists. Haven’t you done those palms yet? What a long time you are taking

over them! Do you think you have got the colour quite right on those stems? Nothing is so difficult to do as palms, though they look so easy—except olives: olives are impossible. But what were you going to say about your father? Papa says he has not seen Mr Waring for ages. When will you come up to see us?”

“It was only last Saturday, Tasie.”

“——Week,” said Tasie. “Oh yes, I assure you; for I put it down in my diary: Saturday week. You can’t quite tell how time goes, when you don’t come to church. Without Sunday, all the days are alike. I wondered that you were not at church last Sunday, Frances, and so did mamma.”

“Why was it? I forget. I had a headache, I think. I never like to stay away. But I went to church here in the village instead.”

“O Frances, I wonder your papa lets you do that! It is much better when you have a headache to stay at home. I am sure I don’t want to be intolerant, but what good can it do you going there? You can’t understand a word.”

“Yes, indeed I do—many words. Mariuccia has shown me all the places; and it is good to

see the people all saying their prayers. They are a great deal more in earnest than the people down at the Marina, where it would be just as natural to dance as to pray."

"Ah, dance!" said Tasie, with a little sigh. "You know there is never anything of that kind here. I suppose you never was at a dance in your life—unless it is in summer, when you go away?"

"I have never been at a dance in my life. I have seen a ballet, that is all."

"O Frances, please don't talk of anything so wicked! A ballet! that is very different from nice people dancing—from dancing one's own self with a nice partner. However, as we never do dance here, I can't see why you should say that about our church. It is a pity, to be sure, that we have no right church; but it is a lovely room, and quite suitable. If you would only practise the harmonium a little, so as to take the music when I am away. I never can afford to have a headache on Sunday," Miss Durant added, in an injured tone.

"But, Tasie, how could I take the harmonium, when I don't even know how to play?"

“I have offered to teach you; till I am tired, Frances. I wonder what your papa thinks, if he calls it reasonable to leave you without any accomplishments? You can draw a little, it is true; but you can’t bring out your sketches in the drawing-room of an evening, to amuse people; and you can always play——”

“When you *can* play.”

“Yes, of course that is what I mean—when you can play. It has quite vexed me often to think how little trouble is taken about you; for you can’t always be young, so young as you are now. And suppose some time you should have to go home—to your friends, you know?”

Frances raised her head from her drawing and looked her companion in the face. “I don’t think we have any—friends,” she said.

“Oh, my dear, that must be nonsense!” cried Tasie. “I confess I have never heard your papa talk of any. He never says ‘my brother,’ or ‘my sister,’ or ‘my brother-in-law,’ as other people do—but then he is such a very quiet man; and you must have somebody—cousins at least—you must have cousins; nobody is without somebody,” Miss Durant said.

“Well, I suppose we must have cousins,” said Frances. “I had not thought of it. But I don’t see that it matters much; for if my cousins are surprised that I can’t play, it will not hurt them—they can’t be considered responsible for me, you know.”

Tasie looked at her with the look of one who would say much if she could—wistfully and kindly, yet with something of the air of mingled importance and reluctance with which the bearer of ill news hesitates before opening his budget. She had indeed no actual ill news to tell, only the burden of that fact of which everybody felt Frances should be warned—that her father was looking more delicate than ever, and that his “friends” ought to know. She would have liked to speak, and yet she had not courage to do so. The girl’s calm consent that probably she must have cousins was too much for any one’s patience. She never seemed to think that one day she might have to be dependent on these cousins; she never seemed to think——But after all, it was Mr Waring’s fault. It was not poor Frances that was to blame.

“You know how often I have said to you

that you ought to play, you ought to be able to play. Supposing you have not any gift for it, still you might be able to do a little. You could so easily get an old piano, and I should like to teach you. It would not be a task at all. I should like it. I do so wish you would begin. Drawing and languages depend a great deal upon your own taste and upon your opportunities; but every lady ought to play."

Tasie (or Anastasia, but that name was too long for anybody's patience) was a great deal older than Frances—so much older as to justify the hyperbole that she might be her mother; but of this fact she herself was not aware. It may seem absurd to say so, but yet it was true. She knew, of course, how old she was, and how young Frances was; but her faculties were of the kind which do not perceive differences. Tasie herself was just as she had been at Frances' age—the girl at home, the young lady of the house. She had the same sort of occupations: to arrange the flowers; to play the harmonium in the little colonial chapel; to look after the little exotic Sunday-school; to take care of papa's surplice; to play a little

in the evenings when they "had people with them"; to do fancy-work, and look out for such amusements as were going. It would be cruel to say how long this condition of young-ladyhood had lasted, especially as Tasie was a very good girl, kind, and friendly, and simple-hearted, and thinking no evil.

Some women chafe at the condition which keeps them still girls when they are no longer girls; but Miss Durant had never taken it into her consideration. She had a little more of the housekeeping to do, since mamma had become so delicate; and she had a great deal to fill up her time, and no leisure to think or inquire into her own position. It was her position, and therefore the best position which any girl could have. She had the satisfaction of being of the greatest use to her parents, which is the thing of all others which a good child would naturally desire. She talked to Frances without any notion of an immeasurable distance between them, from the same level, though with a feeling that the girl, by reason of having had no mother, poor thing, was lamentably backward in many ways, and sadly blind,

though that was natural, to the hazard of her own position. What would become of her if Mr Waring died? Tasia would sometimes grow quite anxious about this, declaring that she could not sleep for thinking of it. If there were relations—as of course there must be—she felt that they would think Frances sadly deficient. To teach her to play was the only practical way in which she could show her desire to benefit the girl, who, she thought, might accept the suggestion from a girl like herself, when she might not have done so from a more authoritative voice.

Frances on her part accepted the suggestion with placidity, and replied that she would think of it, and ask her father; and perhaps if she had time—— But she did not really at all intend to learn music of Tasia. She had no desire to know just as much as Tasia did, whose accomplishments, as well as her age and her condition altogether, were quite evident and clear to the young creature, whose eyes possessed the unbiassed and distinct vision of youth. She appraised Miss Durant exactly at her real value, as the young so

constantly do, even when they are quite submissive to the little conventional fables of life, and never think of asserting their superior knowledge; but the conversation was suggestive, and beguiled her mind into many new channels of thought. The cousins unknown—should she ever be brought into intercourse with them, and enter perhaps a kind of other world through their means—would they think it strange that she knew so little, and could not play the piano? Who were they? These thoughts circled vaguely in her mind through all Tasie's talk, and kept flitting out and in of her brain, even when she removed to the tea-table and poured out some tea. Tasie always admired the cups. She cried, "This is a new one, Frances. Oh, how lucky you are! What pretty bits you have picked up!" with all the ardour of a collector. And then she began to talk of the old Savona pots, which were to be had so cheap, quite cheap, but which, she heard at home, were so much thought of.

Frances did not pay much attention to the discourse about the Savona pots; she went

on with her thoughts about the cousins, and when Miss Durant went away, gave herself up entirely to those speculations. What sort of people would they be? Where would they live? And then there recurred to her mind the meeting of the morning, and what the stranger said who knew her father. It was almost the first time she had ever seen him meet any one whom he knew, except the acquaintances of recent times, with whom she had made acquaintance, as he did. But the stranger of the morning evidently knew about him in a period unknown to Frances. She had made a slight and cautious attempt to find out something about him at breakfast, but it had not been successful. She wondered whether she would have courage to ask her father now in so many words who he was and what he meant.

CHAPTER III.

As it turned out, Frances had not the courage. Mr Waring strolled into the loggia shortly after Miss Durant had left her. He smiled when he heard of her visit, and asked what news she had brought. Tasie was the recognised channel for news, and seldom appeared without leaving some little story behind her.

“I don’t think she had any news to-day, except that there had been a great many at the Sunday-school last Sunday. Fancy, papa, twelve children ! She is quite excited about it.”

“That is a triumph,” said Mr Waring, with a laugh. He stretched out his long limbs from the low basket-chair in which he had placed himself. He had relaxed a little altogether from the tension of the morning, feeling himself secure and at his ease in his own house, where

no one could intrude upon him or call up ghosts of the past. The air was beyond expression sweet and tranquillising, the sun going down in a mist of glory behind the endless peaks and ridges that stretched away towards the west, the sea lapping the shore with a soft cadence that was more imagined than heard on the heights of the Punto, but yet added another harmony to the scene. Near at hand a faint wind rustled the long leaves of the palm-trees, and the pale olive woods lent a softness to the landscape, tempering its radiance. Such a scene fills up the weary mind, and has the blessed quality of arresting thought. It was good for the breathing too—or at least so this invalid thought—and he was more amiable than usual, with no harshness in voice or temper to introduce a discord. “I am glad she was pleased,” he said. “Tasie is a good girl, though not perhaps so much of a girl as she thinks. Why she goes in for a Sunday-school where none is wanted, I can’t tell; but anyhow, I am glad she is pleased. Where did they come from, the twelve children? Poor little beggars, how sick of it they must have been!”

“A number of them belonged to that English family, papa——”

“I suppose they must all belong to English families,” he said, calmly; “the natives are not such fools.”

“But, papa, I mean—the people we met—the people you knew.”

He made no reply for a few minutes, and then he said calmly, “What an ass the man must be, not only to travel with children, but to send them to poor Tasie’s Sunday-school! You must do me the justice, Fan, to acknowledge that I never attempted to treat you in that way.”

“No; but, papa—perhaps the gentleman is a very religious man.”

“And you don’t think I am? Well, perhaps I laid myself open to such a retort.”

“O papa!” Frances cried, with tears starting to her eyes, “you know I could not mean that.”

“If you take religion as meaning a life by rule, which is its true meaning, you were right enough, my dear. That is what I never could do. It might have been better for me if I had been more capable of it. It is always better to put one’s self in harmony with received notions

and the prejudices of society. Tasie would not have her Sunday-school but for that. It is the right thing. I think you have a leaning towards the right thing, my little girl, yourself."

"I don't like to be particular, papa, if that is what you mean."

"Always keep to that," her father said, with a smile. And then he opened the book which he had been holding all this time in his hand. Such a thing had happened, when Frances was in high spirits and very courageous, as that she had pursued him even into his book; but it was a very rare exercise of valour, and to-day she shrank from it. If she only had the courage! But she had not the courage. She had given up her drawing, for the sun no longer shone on the group of palms. She had no book, and indeed at any time was not much given to reading, except when a happy chance threw a novel into her hands. She watched the sun go down by imperceptible degrees, yet not slowly, behind the mountains. When he had quite disappeared, the landscape changed too; the air, as the Italians say, grew brown; a little momentary chill breathed out of the sky. It

is always depressing to a solitary watcher when this change takes place.

Frances was not apt to be depressed, but for the moment she felt lonely and dull, and a great sense of monotony took hold upon her. It was like this every night; it would be like this, so far as she knew, every night to come, until perhaps she grew old, like Tasie, without becoming aware that she had ceased to be a girl. It was not a cheering prospect. And when there is any darkness or mystery surrounding one's life, these are just the circumstances to quicken curiosity, and turn it into something graver, into an anxious desire to know. Frances did not know positively that there was a mystery. She had no reason to think there was, she said to herself. Her father preferred to live easily on the Riviera, instead of living in a way that would trouble him at home. Perhaps the gentleman they had met was a bore, and that was why Mr Waring avoided all mention of him. He frequently thought people were bores, with whom Frances was very well satisfied. Why should she think any more of it? Oh, how she wished she had the courage

to ask plainly and boldly, Who are we? Where do we come from? Have we any friends? But she had not the courage. She looked towards him, and trembled, imagining within herself what would be the consequence if she interrupted his reading, plucked him out of the quietude of the hour and of his book, and demanded an explanation—when very likely there was no explanation! when, in all probability, everything was quite simple, if she only knew.

The evening passed as evenings generally did pass in the Palazzo. Mr Waring talked a little at dinner quite pleasantly, and smoked a cigarette in the loggia afterwards in great good-humour, telling Frances various little stories of people he had known. This was a sign of high satisfaction on his part, and very agreeable to her, and no doubt he was entirely unaware of the perplexity in her mind and the questions she was so desirous of asking. The air was peculiarly soft that evening, and he sat in the loggia till the young moon set, with an overcoat on his shoulders and a rug on his knees, sometimes talking, sometimes silent—in either way

a very agreeable companion. Frances had never been cooped up in streets, or exposed to the chill of an English spring; so she had not that keen sense of contrast which doubles the enjoyment of a heavenly evening in such a heavenly locality. It was all quite natural, common, and everyday to her; but no one could be indifferent to the sheen of the young moon, to the soft circling of the darkness, and the reflections on the sea. It was all very lovely, and yet there was something wanting. What was wanting? She thought it was knowledge, acquaintance with her own position, and relief from this strange bewildering sensation of being cut off from the race altogether, which had risen within her mind so quickly and with so little cause.

But many beside Frances have felt the wistful call for happiness more complete, which comes in the soft darkening of a summer night; and probably it was not explanation, but something else, more common to human nature, that she wanted. The voices of the peaceful people outside, the old men and women who came out to sit on the benches upon the Punto, or on the

stone seat under the wall of the Palazzo, and compare their experiences, and enjoy the cool of the evening, sounded pleasantly from below. There was a softened din of children playing, and now and then a sudden rush of voices, when the young men who were strolling about got excited in conversation, and stopped short in their walk for the delivery of some sentence more emphatic than the rest; and the mothers chattered over their babies, cooing and laughing. The babies should have been in bed, Frances said to herself, half laughing, half crying, in a sort of tender anger with them all for being so familiar and so much at home. They were entirely at home where they were; they knew everybody, and were known from father to son, and from mother to daughter, all about them. They did not call a distant and unknown country by that sweet name, nor was there one among them who had any doubt as to where he or she was born. This thought made Frances sigh, and then made her smile. After all, if that was all! And then she saw that Domenico had brought the lamp into the *salone*, and that it was time to go indoors.

Next morning she went out between the early coffee and the mid-day breakfast to do some little household business, on which, in consideration that she was English and not bound by the laws that are so hard and fast with Italian girls, Mariuccia consented to let her go alone. It was very seldom that Mr Waring went out or indeed was visible at that hour, the expedition of the former day being very exceptional. Frances went down to the shops to do her little commissions for Mariuccia. She even investigated the Savona pots of which Tasic had spoken. In her circumstances, it was scarcely possible not to be more or less of a collector. There is nobody in these regions who does not go about with eyes open to anything there may be to "pick up." And after this she walked back through the olive woods, by those distracting little terraces which lead the stranger so constantly out of his way, but are quite simple to those who are to the manner born—until she reached once more the broad piece of unshadowed road which leads up to the old town. At the spot at which she and her father had met the English family yesterday,

she made a momentary pause, recalling all the circumstances of the meeting, and what the stranger had said—"A fellow that stuck by you all through." All through what? she asked herself. As she paused to make this little question, to which there was no response, she heard a sound of voices coming from the upper side of the wood, where the slopes rose high into more and more olive gardens. "Don't hurry along so; I'm coming," some one said. Frances looked up, and her heart jumped into her mouth as she perceived that it was once more the English family whom she was about to meet on the same spot.

The father was in advance this time, and he was hurrying down, she thought, with the intention of addressing her. What should she do? She knew very well what her father would have wished her to do; but probably for that very reason a contradictory impulse arose in her. Without doubt, she wanted to know what this man knew and could tell her. Not that she would ask him anything; she was too proud for that. To betray that she was not acquainted with her father's affairs, that she

had to go to a stranger for information, was a thing of which she was incapable. But if he wished to speak to her—to send, perhaps, some message to her father? Frances quieted her conscience in this way. She was very anxious, excited by the sense that there was something to find out; and if it was anything her father would not approve, why, then she could shut it up in her own breast and never let him know it to trouble him. And it was right at her age that she should know. All these sophistries hurried through her mind more rapidly than lightning during the moment in which she paused hesitating, and gave the large Englishman, overwhelmed with the heat, and hurrying down the steep path with his white umbrella over his head, time to make up to her. He was rather out of breath, for though he had been coming down hill, and not going up, the way was steep.

“Miss Waring, Miss Waring!” he cried as he approached, “how is your father? I want to ask for your father,” taking off his straw hat and exposing his flushed countenance under the shadow of the green-lined umbrella, which en-

hanced all its ruddy tints. Then, as he came within reach of her, he added hastily, "I am so glad I have met you. How is he? for he did not give me any address."

"Papa is quite well, thank you," said Frances, with the habitual response of a child.

"Quite well? Oh, that is a great deal more than I expected to hear. He was not quite well yesterday, I am sure. He is dreadfully changed. It was a sort of guesswork my recognising him at all. He used to be such a powerful-made man. Is it pulmonary? I suspect it must be something of the kind, he has so wasted away."

"Pulmonary? Indeed I don't know. He has a little asthma sometimes. And of course he is very thin," said Frances; "but that does not mean anything; he is quite well."

The stranger shook his head. He had taken the opportunity to wipe it with a large white handkerchief, and had made his bald forehead look redder than ever. "I shouldn't like to alarm you," he said—"I wouldn't, for all the world; but I hope you have trustworthy advice? These Italian doctors, they are not much

to be trusted. You should get a real good English doctor to come and have a look at him."

"Oh, indeed, it is only asthma; he is well enough, quite well, not anything the matter with him," Frances protested. The large stranger stood and smiled compassionately upon her, still shaking his head.

"Mary," he said—"here, my dear! This is Miss Waring. She says her father is quite well, poor thing. I am telling her I am so very glad we have met her, for Waring did not leave me any address."

"How do you do, my dear?" said the stout lady—not much less red than her husband—who had also hurried down the steep path to meet Frances. "And your father is quite well? I am so glad. We thought him looking rather—thin; not so strong as he used to look."

"But then," added her husband, "it is such a long time since we have seen him, and he never was very stout. I hope, if you will pardon me for asking, that things have been smoothed down between him and the rest of

the family? When I say 'smoothed down,' I mean set on a better footing—more friendly, more harmonious. I am very glad I have seen you, to inquire privately; for one never knows how far to go with a man of his—well—peculiar temper."

"Don't say that, George. You must not think, my dear, that Mr Mannering means anything that is not quite nice, and friendly, and respectful to your papa. It is only out of kindness that he asks. Your poor papa has been much tried. I am sure he has always had my sympathy, and my husband's too. Mr Mannering only means that he hopes things are more comfortable between your father and—— Which is so much to be desired for everybody's sake."

The poor girl stood and stared at them with large, round, widely opening eyes, with the wondering stare of a child. There had been a little half-mischievous, half-anxious longing in her mind to find out what these strangers knew; but now she came to herself suddenly, and felt as a traveller feels who all at once pulls himself up on the edge of a precipice. What

was this pitfall which she had nearly stumbled into, this rent from the past which was so great and so complete that she had never heard of it, never guessed it? Fright seized upon her, and dismay, and, what probably stood her in more stead for the moment, a stinging sensation of wounded pride, which brought the colour burning to her cheeks. Must she let these people find out that she knew nothing, at her age—that her father had never confided in her at all—that she could not even form an idea what they were talking about? She had pleased herself with the possibility of some little easy discovery—of finding out, perhaps, something about the cousins whom it seemed certain, according to Tasie, every one must possess, whether they were aware of it or not—some little revelation of origin and connections such as could do nobody any harm. But when she woke up suddenly to find herself as it were upon the edge of a chasm which had split her father's life in two, the young creature trembled. She was frightened beyond measure by this unexpected contingency; she dared not listen to another word.

“Oh,” she said, with a quiver in her voice, “I am afraid I have no time to stop and talk. Papa will be waiting for his breakfast. I will tell him you—asked for him.”

“Give him our love,” said the lady. “Indeed, George, she is quite right; we must hurry too, or we shall be too late for the *table d’hôte*.”

“But I have not got the address,” said the husband. Frances made a little curtsy, as she had been taught, and waved her hand as she hurried away. He thought that she had not understood him. “Where do you live?” he called after her as she hastened along. She pointed towards the height of the little town, and alarmed for she knew not what, lest he should follow her, lest he should call something after her which she ought not to hear, fled along towards the steep ascent. She could hear the voices behind her slightly elevated talking to each other, and then the sound of the children rattling down the stony course of the higher road, and the quick question and answer as they rejoined their parents. Then gradually everything relapsed into silence as the party disappeared. When she heard the

voices no longer, Frances began to regret that she had been so hasty. She paused for a moment, and looked back; but already the family were almost out of sight, the solid figures which led the procession indistinguishable from the little ones who straggled behind. Whether it might have been well or ill to take advantage of the chance, it was now over. She arrived at the Palazzo out of breath, and found Domenico at the door, looking out anxiously for her. "The signorina is late," he said, very gravely; "the padrone has almost had to wait for his breakfast." Domenico was quite original, and did not know that such a terrible possibility had threatened any illustrious personage before.

CHAPTER IV.

It was natural that this occurrence should take a great hold of the girl's mind. It was not the first time that she had speculated concerning their life. A life which one has always lived, indeed, the conditions of which have been familiar and inevitable since childhood, is not a matter which awakens questions in the mind. However extraordinary its conditions may be, they are natural—they are life to the young soul which has had no choice in the matter. Still there are curiosities which will arise. General Gaunt foamed at the mouth when he talked of the way in which he had been treated by the people "at home"; but still he went "home" in the summer as a matter of course. And as for the Durants, it was a subject of the fondest consideration with them when they

could afford themselves that greatest of delights. They all talked about the cold, the fogs, the pleasure of getting back to the sunshine when they returned; but this made no difference in the fact that to go home was their thought all the year, and the most salient point in their lives. "Why do we never go home?" Frances had often asked herself. And both these families, and all the people to whom she had ever talked, the strangers who went and came, and those whom they met in the rambles which the Warings, too, were forced to take in the hot weather, when the mistral was blowing—talked continually of their county, of their parish, of their village, of where they lived, and where they had been born. But on these points Mr Waring never said a word. And whereas Mrs Gaunt could talk of nothing but her family, who were scattered all over the world, and the Durants met people they knew at every turn, the Warings knew nobody, had no relations, no house at home, and apparently had been born nowhere in particular, as Frances sometimes said to herself with more annoyance than humour. Some-

times she wondered whether she had ever had a mother.

These thoughts, indeed, occurred but fitfully now and then, when some incident brought more forcibly than usual under her notice the difference between herself and others. She did not brood over them, her life being quite pleasant and comfortable to herself, and no necessity laid upon her to elucidate its dimnesses. But yet they came across her mind from time to time. She had not been brought face to face with any old friend of her father's, that she could remember, until now. She had never heard any question raised about his past life. And yet no doubt he had a past life, like every other man, and there was something in it—something, she could not guess what, which had made him unlike other men.

Frances had a great deal of self-command. She did not betray her agitation to her father; she did not ask him any questions; she told him about the greengrocer and the fisherman, these two important agents in the life of the Riviera, and of what she had seen in the Marina, even the Savona pots; but she did

not disturb his meal and his digestion by any reference to the English strangers. She postponed until she had time to think of it, all reference to this second meeting. She had by instinct made no reply to the question about where she lived ; but she knew that there would be no difficulty in discovering that, and that her father might be subject at any moment to invasion by this old acquaintance, whom he had evidently no desire to see. What should she do ? The whole matter wanted thought. Whether she should ask him what to do ; whether she should take it upon herself ; whether she should disclose to him her new-born curiosity and anxiety, or conceal them in her own bosom ; whether she should tell him frankly what she felt—that she was worthy to be trusted, and that it was the right of his only child to be prepared for all emergencies, and to be acquainted with her family and her antecedents, if not with his,—all these were things to be thought over. Surely she had a right, if any one had a right. But she would not stand upon that.

She sat by herself all day and thought, put-

ting forward all the arguments on either side. If there was, as there might be, something wrong in that past—something guilty, which might make her look on her father with different eyes, he had a right to be silent, and she no right, none whatever, to insist upon such a revelation. And what end would it serve? If she had relations or a family from whom she had been separated, would not the revelation fill her with eager desire to know them, and open a fountain of dissatisfaction and discontent in her life if she were not permitted to do so? Would she not chafe at the banishment if she found out that somewhere there was a home, that she had “belongings” like all the rest of the world? These were little feeble barriers which she set up against the strong tide of consciousness in her that she was to be trusted, that she ought to know. Whatever it was, and however she might bear it, was it not true that she ought to know? She was not a fool or a child. Frances knew that her eighteen years had brought more experience, more sense to her, than Tasie’s forty; that she was capable of understanding, capable

of keeping a secret—and was it not her own secret, the explanation of the enigma of her life as well as of his ?

This course of reflection went on in her mind until the evening, and it was somewhat quickened by a little conversation which she had in the afternoon with the servants. Domenico was going out. It was early in the afternoon, the moment of leisure, when one meal with all its responsibilities was over, and the second great event of the day, the dinner, not yet imminent. It was the hour when Mariuccia sat in the ante-room and did her sewing, her mending, her knitting—whatever was wanted. This was a large and lofty room—not very light, with a great window looking out only into the court of the Palazzo—in which stood a long table and a few tall chairs. The smaller ante-room, from which the long suite of rooms opened on either side, communicated with this, as did also the corridor, which ran all the length of the house, and the kitchen and its appendages on the other side. There is always abundance of space of this kind in every old Italian house. Here Mariuccia established her-

self whenever she was free to leave her cooking and her kitchen-work. She was a comely middle-aged woman, with a dark gown, a white apron, a little shawl on her shoulders, large earrings, and a gold cross at her neck, which was a little more visible than is common with Englishwomen of her class. Her hair was crisp and curly, and never had been covered with anything, save, when she went to church, a shawl or veil; and Mariuccia's olive complexion and ruddy tint feared no encounter of the sun. Domenico was tall, and spare, and brown, a grave man with little jest in him; but his wife was always ready to laugh. He came out hat in hand while Frances stood by the table inspecting Mariuccia's work. "I am going out," he said; "and this is the hour when the English gentlefolks pay visits. See that thou remember what the padrone said."

"What did the padrone say?" cried Frances, pricking up her ears.

"Signorina, it was to my wife I was speaking," said Domenico.

"That I understand; but I wish to know as well. Was papa expecting a visit? What did he say?"

“The padrone himself will tell the signorina,” said Domenico, “all that is intended for her. Some things are for the servants, some for the family; Mariuccia knows what I mean.”

“You are an ass, ‘Menico,” said his wife, calmly. “Why shouldn’t the dear child know? It is nothing to be concerned about, my soul—only that the padrone does not receive, and again that he does not receive, and that he never receives. I must repeat this till the Ave Maria, if necessary, till the strangers accept it and go away.”

“Are these special orders?” said Frances, “or has it always been so? I don’t think that it has always been so.”

Domenico had gone out while his wife was speaking, with a half-threatening and wholly disapproving look, as if he would not involve himself in the responsibility which Mariuccia had taken upon her.

“*Carina*, don’t trouble yourself about it. It has always been so in the spirit, if not in the letter,” said Mariuccia. “Figure to yourself Domenico or me letting in any one, any one that chose to come, to disturb the signor pa-

drone! That would be impossible. It appears, however, that there is some one down there in the hotels to whom the padrone has a great objection, greater than to the others. It is no secret, nothing to trouble you. But 'Menico, though he is a good man, is not very wise. *Che!* you know that as well as I."

"And what will you do if this gentleman will not pay any attention—if he comes in all the same? The English don't understand what it means when you say you do not receive. You must say he is not in; he has gone out; he is not at home."

"*Che! che! che!*" cried Mariuccia; "little deceiver! But that would be a lie."

Frances shook her head. "Yes; I suppose so," she said, with a troubled look; "but if you don't say it, the Englishman will come in all the same."

"He will come in, then, over my body," cried Mariuccia with a cheerful laugh, standing square and solid against the door.

This gave the last impulse to Frances' thoughts. She could not go on with her study of the palms. She sat with her pencil

in her hand, and the colour growing dry, thinking all the afternoon through. It was very certain, then, that her father would not expose himself to another meeting with the strangers who called themselves his friends—innocent people who would not harm any one, Frances was sure. They were tourists—that was evident; and they might be vulgar—that was possible. But she was sure that there was no harm in them. It could only be that her father was resolute to shut out his past, and let no one know what had been. This gave her an additional impulse, instead of discouragement. If it was so serious, and he so determined, then surely there must be something that she, his only child, ought to know. She waited till the evening with a gradually growing excitement; but not until after dinner, after the soothing cigarette, which he puffed so slowly and luxuriously in the loggia, did she venture to speak. Then the day was over. It could not put him out, or spoil his appetite, or risk his digestion. To be sure, it might interfere with his sleep; but after consideration, Frances did not think that a very

serious matter, probably because she had never known what it was to pass a wakeful night. She began, however, with the greatest caution and care.

"Papa," she said, "I want to consult you about something Tasie was saying."

"Ah! that must be something very serious, no doubt."

"Not serious, perhaps; but——she wants to teach me to play."

"To play! What? Croquet? or whist, perhaps? I have always heard she was excellent at both."

"These are games, papa," said Frances, with a touch of severity. "She means the piano, which is very different."

"Ah!" said Mr Waring, taking the cigarette from his lips and sending a larger puff of smoke into the dim air; "very different indeed, Frances. It is anything but a game to hear Miss Tasie play."

"She says," continued Frances, with a certain constriction in her throat, "that every lady is expected to play—to play a little at least, even if she has not much taste for it.

She thinks when we go home—that all our relations will be so surprised——”

She stopped, having no breath to go further, and watched as well as she could, through the dimness and through the mist of agitation in her own eyes, her father's face. He made no sign; he did not disturb even the easy balance of his foot, stretched out along the pavement. After another pause, he said in the same indifferent tone, “As we are not going home, and as you have no relations in particular, I don't think your friend's argument is very strong. Do you?”

“O papa, I don't want indeed to be inquisitive or trouble you, but I should like to know!”

“What?” he said, with the same composure. “If I think that a lady, whether she has any musical taste or not, ought to play? Well, that is a very simple question. I don't, whatever Miss Tasie may say.”

“It is not that,” Frances said, regaining a little control of herself. “I said I did not know of any relations we had. But Tasie said there must be cousins; we must have

cousins—everybody has cousins. That is true, is it not ?”

“In most cases, certainly,” Mr Waring said ;
“and a great nuisance too.”

“I don’t think it would be a nuisance to have people about one’s own age, belonging to one—not strangers—people who were interested in you, to whom you could say anything. Brothers and sisters, that would be the best ; but cousins—I think, papa, cousins would be very nice.”

“I will tell you, if you like, of one cousin you have,” her father said.

The heart of Frances swelled as if it would leap out of her breast. She put her hands together, turning full round upon him in an attitude of supplication and delight. “O papa !” she cried with enthusiasm, breathless for his next word.

“Certainly, if you wish it, Frances. He is in reality your first-cousin. He is fifty. He is a great sufferer from gout. He has lived so well in the early part of his life, that he is condemned to slops now, and spends most of his time in an easy-chair. He has the temper of a demon, and swears at everybody that comes near him. He

is very red in the face, very bleared about the eyes, very——”

“O papa!” she cried, in a very different tone. She was so much disappointed, that the sudden downfall had almost a physical effect upon her, as if she had fallen from a height. Her father laughed softly while she gathered all her strength together to regain command of herself, and the laugh had a jarring effect upon her nerves, of which she had never been conscious till now.

“I don’t suppose that he would care much whether you played the piano or not; or that you would care much, my dear, what he thought.”

“For all that, papa,” said Frances, recovering herself, “it is a little interesting to know there is somebody, even if he is not at all what one thought. Where does he live, and what is his name? That will give me one little landmark in England, where there is none now.”

“Not a very reasonable satisfaction,” said her father lazily, but without any other reply. “In my life, I have always found relations a nuisance. Happy are they who have none; and next best is to cast them off and do without them. As

a matter of fact, it is every one for himself in this world."

Frances was silenced, though not convinced. She looked with some anxiety at the outline of her father's spare and lengthy figure laid out in the basket-chair, one foot moving slightly, which was a habit he had, the whole extended in perfect rest and calm. He was not angry, he was not disturbed. The questions which she had put with so much mental perturbation had not affected him at all. She felt that she might dare further without fear.

"When I was out to-day," she said, faltering a little, "I met—that gentleman again."

"Ah!" said Mr Waring—no more; but he ceased to shake his foot, and turned towards her the merest hair's-breadth, so little that it was impossible to say he had moved, and yet there was a change.

"And the lady," said Frances, breathless. "I am sure they wanted to be kind. They asked me a great many questions."

He gave a faint laugh, but it was not without a little quiver in it. "What a good thing that you could not answer them!" he said.

“Do you think so, papa? I was rather unhappy. It looked as if you could not trust me. I should have been ashamed to say I did not know; which is the truth—for I know nothing, not so much as where I was born!” cried the girl. “It is very humiliating, when you are asked about your own father, to say you don’t know. So I said it was time for breakfast, and you would be waiting; and ran away.”

“The best thing you could have done, my dear. Discretion in a woman, or a girl, is always the better part of valour. I think you got out of it very cleverly,” Mr Waring said.

And that was all. He did not seem to think another word was needed. He did not even rise and go away, as Frances had known him to do when the conversation was not to his mind. She could not see his face, but his attitude was unchanged. He had recovered his calm, if there had ever been any disturbance of it. But as for Frances, her heart was thumping against her breast, her pulses beating in her ears, her lips parched and dry. “I wish,” she cried, “oh, I wish you would tell me something, papa! Do you think I would

talk of things you don't want talked about? I am not a child any longer; and I am not silly, as perhaps you think."

"On the contrary, my dear," said Mr Waring, "I think you are often very sensible."

"Papa! oh, how can you say that, how can you say such things—and then leave me as if I were a baby, knowing nothing!"

"My dear," he said (with the sound of a smile in his voice, she thought to herself), "you are very hard to please. Must not I say that you are sensible? I think it is the highest compliment I can pay you."

"O papa!" Disappointment, and mortification, and the keen sense of being fooled, which is so miserable to the young, took her very breath away. The exasperation with which we discover that not only is no explanation, no confidence to be given us, but the very occasion for it ignored, and our anxiety baffled by a smile—a mortification to which women are so often subject—flooded her being. She had hard ado not to burst into angry tears, not to betray the sense of cruelty and injustice which overwhelmed her; but who could have seen any

injustice or cruelty in the gentleness of his tone, his soft reply? Frances subdued herself as best she could in her dark corner of the loggia, glad at least that he could not see the spasm that passed over her, the acute misery and irritation of her spirit. It would be strange if he did not divine something of what was going on within her: but he took no notice. He began in the same tone, as if one theme was quite as important as the other, to remark upon the unusual heaviness of the clouds which hid the moon. "If we were in England, I should say there was a storm brewing," he said. "Even here, I think we shall have some rain. Don't you feel that little *creep* in the air, something sinister, as if there was a bad angel about? And Domenico, I see, has brought the lamp. I vote we go in."

"Are there any bad angels?" she cried, to give her impatience vent.

He had risen up, and stood swaying indolently from one foot to the other. "Bad angels? Oh yes," he said; "abundance; very different from devils, who are honest—like the fiends in the pictures, unmistakable. The others, you know, deceive. Don't you remember?—

‘How there looked him in the face
An angel beautiful and bright;
And how he knew it was a fiend,
That miserable knight.’”

He turned and went into the *salone*, repeating these words in an undertone to himself. But there was in his face none of the bitterness or horror with which they must have been said by one who had ever in his own person made that discovery. He was quite calm, meditative, marking with a slight intonation and movement of his head the cadence of the poetry.

Frances stayed behind in the darkness. She had not the practice which we acquire in later life; she could not hide the excitement which was still coursing through her veins. She went to the corner of the loggia which was nearest the sea, and caught in her face the rush of the rising breeze, which flung at her the first drops of the coming rain. A storm on that soft coast is a welcome break in the monotony of the clear skies and unchanging calm. After a while her father called to her that the rain was coming in, that the windows must be shut; and she hurried in, brushing by Domenico, who had come to close everything up, and who looked

at her reproachfully as she rushed past him. She came behind her father's chair and leaned over to kiss him. "I have got a little wet, and I think I had better go to bed," she said.

"Yes, surely, if you wish it, my dear," said Mr Waring. Something moist had touched his forehead, which was too warm to be rain. He waited politely till she had gone before he wiped it off. It was the edge of a tear, hot, miserable, full of anger as well as pain, which had made that mark upon his high white forehead. It made him pause for a minute or two in his reading. "Poor little girl!" he said, with a sigh. Perhaps he was not so insensible as he seemed.

CHAPTER V.

It is a common impression that happiness and unhappiness are permanent states of mind, and that for long tracts of our lives we are under the continuous sway of one or other of these conditions. But this is almost always a mistake, save in the case of grief, which is perhaps the only emotion which is beyond the reach of the momentary lightnings and alleviations and perpetual vicissitudes of life. Death, and the pangs of separation from those we love, are permanent, at least for their time; but in everything else there is an ebb and flow which keeps the heart alive. When Frances Waring told the story of this period of her life, she represented herself unconsciously as having been oppressed by the mystery that overshadowed her, and as having lost all the ease

of her young life prematurely in a sudden encounter with shadows unsuspected before. But as a matter of fact, this was not the case. She had a bad night—that is, she cried herself asleep; but once over the boundary which divides our waking thoughts from the visions of the night, she knew no more till the sun came in and woke her to a very cheerful morning. It is true that care made several partially successful assaults upon her that day and for several days after. But as everything went on quite calmly and peacefully, the impression wore off. The English family found out, as was inevitable, where Mr Waring lived, without any difficulty; and first the father came, then the mother, and finally the pair together, to call. Frances, to whom a breach of decorum or civility was pain unspeakable, sat trembling and ashamed in the deepest corner of the loggia, while these kind strangers encountered Mariuccia at the door. The scene, as a matter of fact, was rather comic than tragic, for neither the visitors nor the guardian of the house possessed any language but their own; and Mr and Mrs Mannering had as little

understanding of the statement that Mr Waring did not "receive" as Frances had expected.

"But he is in—è *in casa*—è IN?" said the worthy Englishman. "Then, my dear, of course it is only a mistake. When he knows who we are—when he has our names——"

"*Non riceve oggi*," said Mariuccia, setting her sturdy breadth in the doorway; "*oggi non riceve il signore*" (The master does not receive to-day).

"But he is in?" repeated the bewildered good people. They could have understood "Not at home," which to Mariuccia would have been simply a lie—with which indeed, had need been, or could it have done the padrone any good, she would have burdened her conscience as lightly as any one. But why, when it was not in the least necessary?

Thus they played their little game at cross-purposes, while Frances sat, hot and red with shame, in her corner, sensible to the bottom of her heart of the discourtesy, the unkindness, of turning them from the door. They were her father's friends; they claimed to have "stuck by him through thick and thin;" they

were people who knew about him, and all that he belonged to, and the conditions of his former life; and yet they were turned from his door!

She did not venture to go out again for some days, except in the evening, when she knew that all the strangers were at the inevitable *table d'hôte*; and it was with a sigh of relief, yet disappointment, that she heard they had gone away. Yes, at last they did go away, angry, no doubt, thinking her father a churl, and she herself an ignorant rustic, who knew nothing about good manners. Of course this was what they must think. Frances heard those words, "*Non riceve oggi*," even in her dreams. She saw in imagination the astonished faces of the visitors. "But he will receive us, if you will only take in our names;" and then Mariuccia's steady voice repeating the well-known phrase. What must they have thought? That it was an insult—that their old friend scorned and defied them. What else could they suppose?

They departed, however, and Frances got over it: and everything went on as before;

her father was just as usual—a sphinx indeed, more and more hopelessly wrapped up in silence and mystery, but so natural and easy and kind in his uncommunicativeness, with so little appearance of repression or concealment about him, that it was almost impossible to retain any feeling of injury or displeasure. Love is cheated every day in this way by offenders much more serious, who can make their dependants happy even while they are ruining them, and beguile the bitterest anxiety into forgetfulness and smiles. It was easy to make Frances forget the sudden access of wonderment and wounded feeling which had seized her, even without any special exertion; time alone and the calm succession of the days were enough for that. She resumed her little picture of the palms, and was very successful—more than usually so. Mr Waring, who had hitherto praised her little works as he might have praised the sampler of a child, was silenced by this, and took it away with him into his room, and when he brought it back, looked at her with more attention than he had been used to show. “I think,” he said, “little

Fan, that you must be growing up," laying his hand upon her head with a smile.

"I am grown up, papa; I am eighteen," she said.

At which he laughed softly. "I don't think much of your eighteen; but this shows. I should not wonder, with time and work, if—you mightn't be good enough to exhibit at Mentone—after a while."

Frances had been looking at him with an expression of almost rapturous expectation. The poor little countenance fell at this, and a quick sting of mortification brought tears to her eyes. The exhibition at Mentone was an exhibition of amateurs. Tasie was in it, and even Mrs Gaunt, and all the people about who ever spoilt a piece of harmless paper. "O papa!" she said. Since the failure of her late appeal to him, this was the only formula of reproach which she used.

"Well," he said, "are you more ambitious than that, you little thing? Perhaps, by-and-by, you may be fit even for better things."

"It is beautiful," said Mariuccia. "You see where the light goes, and where it is in the

shade. But, *carina*, if you were to copy the face of Domenico, or even mine, that would be more interesting. The palms we can see if we look out of the window; but imagine to yourself that 'Menico might go away, or even might die; and we should not miss him so much if we had his face hung up upon the wall."

"It is easier to do the trees than to do Domenico," said Frances; "they stand still."

"And so would 'Menico stand still, if it was to please the signorina—he is not very well educated, but he knows enough for that; or I myself, though you will think, perhaps, I am too old to make a pretty picture. But if I had my veil on, and my best earrings, and the coral my mother left me——"

"You look very nice, Mariuccia—I like you as you are; but I am not clever enough to make a portrait."

Mariuccia cried out with scorn. "You are clever enough to do whatever you wish to do," she said. "The padrone thinks so too, though he will not say it. Not clever enough! *Magari!* too clever is what you mean."

Frances set up her palms on a little stand of

carved wood, and was very well pleased with herself; but that sentiment palls perhaps sooner than any other. It was very agreeable to be praised, and also it was pleasant to feel that she had finished her work successfully. But after a short time it began to be a great subject of regret that the work was done. She did not know what to do next. To make a portrait of Domenico was above her powers. She idled about for the day, and found it uncomfortable. That is the moment in which it is most desirable to have a friend on whom to bestow one's tediousness. She bethought herself that she had not seen Tasie for a week. It was now more than a fortnight since the events detailed in the beginning of this history. Her father, when asked if he would not like a walk, declined. It was too warm, or too cold, or perhaps too dusty, which was very true; and accordingly she set out alone.

Walking down through the Marina, the little tourist town which was rising upon the shore, she saw some parties of travellers arriving, which always had been a little pleasure to her. It was mingled now with a certain excitement.

Perhaps some of them, like those who had just gone away, might know all about her, more than she knew herself—what a strange thought it was!—some of those unknown people in their travelling cloaks, which looked so much too warm—people whom she had never seen before, who had not a notion that she was Frances Waring! One of the parties was composed of ladies, surrounded and enveloped, so to speak, by a venerable courier, who swept them and their possessions before him into the hotel. Another was led by a father and mother, not at all unlike the pair who had “stuck by” Mr Waring. How strange to imagine that they might not be strangers at all, but people who knew all about her!

In the first group was a girl, who hung back a little from the rest, and looked curiously up at all the houses, as if looking for some one—a tall, fair-haired girl, with a blue veil tied over her hat. She looked tired, but eager, with more interest in her face than any of the others showed. Frances smiled to herself with the half-superiority which a resident is apt to feel: a girl must be very simple indeed, if she thought the houses

on the Marina worth looking at, Frances thought. But she did not pause in her quick walk. The Durants lived at the other end of the Marina, in a little villa built upon a terrace over an olive garden—a low house with no particular beauty, but possessing also a loggia turned to the west, the luxury of building on the Riviera. Here the whole family were seated, the old clergyman with a large English newspaper, which he was reading deliberately from end to end; his wife with a work-basket full of articles to mend; and Tasie at the little tea-table, pouring out the tea. Frances was received with a little clamour of satisfaction, for she was a favourite.

“Sit here, my dear.” “Come this way, close to me, for you know I am getting a little hard of hearing.”

They had always been kind to her, but never, she thought, had she been received with so much cordiality as now.

“Have you come by yourself, Frances? and along the Marina? I think you should make Domenico or his wife walk with you, when you go through the Marina, my dear.”

“Why, Mrs Durant? I have always done it.

Even Mariuccia says it does not matter, as I am an English girl."

"Ah, that may be true ; but English girls are not like American girls. I assure you they are taken a great deal more care of. If you ever go home——"

"And how is your poor father to-day, Frances?" said Mrs Durant.

"Oh, papa is very well. He is not such a poor father. There is nothing the matter with him. At least, there is nothing *new* the matter with him," said Frances, with a little impatience.

"No," said the clergyman, looking up over the top of his spectacles and shaking his head. "Nothing *new* the matter with him. I believe that."

"——If you ever go home," resumed Mrs Durant ; "and of course some time you will go home——"

"I think very likely I never shall," said the girl. "Papa never talks of going home. He says home is here."

"That is all very well for the present moment, my dear ; but I feel sure, for my part, that one time or other it will happen as I say ;

and then you must not let them suppose you have been a little savage, going about as you liked here."

"I don't think any one would care much, Mrs Durant; and I am not going; so you need not be afraid."

"Your poor father," Mr Durant went on in his turn, "has a great deal of self-command, Frances; he has a great deal of self-control. In some ways, that is an excellent quality, but it may be carried too far. I wish very much he would allow me to come and have a talk with him—not as a clergyman, but just in a friendly way."

"I am quite sure you may come and talk with him as much as you like," said Frances, astonished; "or if you want very much to see him, he will come to you."

"Oh, I should not take it upon me to ask that—in the meantime," Mr Durant said.

The girl stared a little, but asked no further questions. There was something among them which she did not understand—a look of curiosity, an air of meaning more than their words said. The Durants were always a little apt to be

didactic, as became a clergyman's family; but Tasie was generally a safe refuge. Frances turned to her with a little sigh of perplexity, hoping to escape further question. "Was the Sunday-school as large last Sunday, Tasie?" she said.

"Oh, Frances, no! Such a disappointment! There were only four! Isn't it a pity? But you see the little Mannerings have all gone away. Such sweet children! and the little one of all has such a voice. They are perhaps coming back for Easter, if they don't stay at Rome; and if so, I think we must put little Herbert in a white surplice—he will look like an angel—and have a real anthem with a soprano solo, for once."

"I doubt if they will all come back," said Mr Durant. "Mr Mannering himself indeed, I don't doubt, *on business*; but as for the family, you must not flatter yourself, Tasie."

"*She* liked the place," said his wife; "and very likely she would think it her duty, if anything is to come of it, you know."

"Be careful," said the clergyman, with a glance aside, which Frances would have been dull indeed not to have perceived was directed

at herself. "Don't say anything that may be premature."

Frances was brave in her way. She felt, with a little rising excitement, that her friends were bursting with some piece of knowledge which they were longing to communicate. It roused in her an impatience and reluctance mingled with keen curiosity. She would not hear it, and yet was breathless with impatience to know what it was.

"Mr Mannering?" she said, deliberately—"that was the gentleman that knew papa."

"You saw him, then?" cried Mrs Durant. There was something like a faint disappointment in her tone.

"He was one of papa's early friends," said Frances, with a little emphasis. "I saw him twice. He and his wife both; they seemed kind people."

Mr Durant and his wife looked at each other, and even Tasic stared over her teacups. "Oh, very kind people, my dear; I don't think you could do better than have full confidence in them," Mrs Durant said.

"And your poor father could not have a truer

friend," said the old clergyman. "You must tell him I am coming to have a talk with him about it. It was a great revelation, but I hope that everything will turn out for the best."

Frances grew redder and redder as she sat a mark for all their arrows. What was it that was a "revelation"? But she would not ask. She began to be angry, and to say to herself that she would put her hands to her ears, that she would listen to nothing.

"Henry!" said Mrs Durant, "who is it that is premature now?"

"I am afraid I can't stay," said Frances, rising quickly from her chair. "I have something to do for Mariuccia. I only came in because—because I was passing. Never mind, Tasie; I know my way so well; and Mr Durant wants some more tea."

"Oh but, Frances, my dear, you really must let me send some one with you. You must not move about in that independent way."

"And we had a great many things to say to you," said the old clergyman, keeping her hand in his. "Are you really in such a hurry? It will be better for yourself to wait a little,

and hear something that will be for your good."

"It cannot be any worse for me to run about to-day than any other day," said Frances, almost sternly; "and whatever there is to hear, won't to-morrow do just as well? I think it is a little funny of you all to speak to me so; but now I must go."

She was so rapid in her movements that she was gone before Tasic could extricate herself from the somewhat crazy little table. And then they all three looked at each other and shook their heads. "Do you think she can know?" "Can she have known it all the time?" "Has Waring told her, or was it Mannering?" they said to each other.

Frances could not hear their mutual questions, but something very like the purport of them got into her agitated brain. She felt sure they were wondering whether she knew—what? this revelation, this something which they had found out. Nothing would make her submit to hear it from them, she said to herself. But the moment was come when she could not be put off any longer. She would go to her father,

and she would not rest until she was informed what it was.

She hastened along, avoiding the Marina, which had amused her on her way, hurrying from terrace to terrace of the olive groves. Her heart was beating fast, and her rapid pace made it faster. But as she thought of her father's unperturbed looks, the calm with which he had received her eager questions, and the very small likelihood that anything she could say about the hints of the Durants would move him, her pace and her excitement both decreased. She went more slowly, less hopefully, back to the Palazzo. It was all very well to say that she must know. But what if he would not tell her? What if he received her questions as he had received them before? The circumstances were not changed, nor was he changed because the Durants knew something, she did not know what. Oh, what a poor piece of friendship was that, that betrayed a friend's secret to his neighbours! She did not know, she could not so much as form a guess, what the secret was. But little or great, his friend should have kept it. She said this to herself

bitterly, when the chill probabilities of the case began to make themselves felt. It was harder to think that the Durants knew, than to be kept in darkness herself.

She went in at last very soberly, with the intention of telling her father all that had passed, if perhaps that of itself might be an inducement to him to have confidence in her. It was not a pleasant mission. Her steps had become very sober as she went up the long marble stair. Mariuccia met her with a little cry. Had she not met the padrone? He had gone out down through the olive woods to meet her and fetch her home. It was a brief reprieve. In the evening after dinner was the time when he was most accessible. Frances, with a thrill of mingled relief and disappointment, retired to her room to make her little toilet. She had an hour or two at least before her ere it would be necessary to speak.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN one has made up one's mind to reopen a painful subject after dinner, the preliminary meal is not usually a very pleasant one; nor, with the tremor of preparation in one's mind, is one likely to make a satisfactory dinner. Frances could not talk about anything. She could not eat; her mind was absorbed in what was coming. It seemed to her that she must speak: and yet how gladly would she have escaped from or postponed the explanation! Explanation! Possibly he would only smile, and baffle her as he had done before; or perhaps be angry, which would be better. Anything would be better than that indifference.

She went out to the loggia when dinner was over, trembling with the sensation of suspense. It was still not dark, and the night was clear

with the young moon already shining, so that between the retiring day and the light of the night it was almost as clear as it had been two hours before. Frances sat down, shivering a little, though not with cold. Usually her father accompanied or immediately followed her, but by some perversity he did not do so to-night. She seated herself in her usual place, and waited, listening for every sound—that is, for sounds of one kind—his slow step coming along the polished floor, here soft and muffled over a piece of carpet, there loud upon the *parquet*. But for some time, during which she rose into a state of feverish expectation, there was no such sound.

It was nearly half an hour, according to her calculation, probably not half so much by common computation of time, when one or two doors were opened and shut quickly and a sound of voices met her ear—not sounds, however, which had any but a partial interest for her, for they did not indicate his approach. After a while there followed the sound of a footstep but it was not Mr Waring's; it was not Domenico's subdued tread, nor the measured

march of Mariuccia. It was light, quick, and somewhat uncertain. Frances was half disappointed, half relieved. Some one was coming, but not her father. It would be impossible to speak to him to-night. The relief was uppermost; she felt it through her whole being. Not to-night; and no one can ever tell what to-morrow may bring forth. She looked up no longer with anxiety, but curiosity, as the door opened. It opened quickly; some one looked out, as if to see what was beyond, then, with a slight exclamation of satisfaction, stepped out upon the loggia into the partial light.

Frances rose up quickly, with the curious sensation of acting over something which she had rehearsed before, she did not know where or how. It was the girl whom she had remarked on the Marina as having just arrived who now stood looking about her curiously, with her travelling-cloak fastened only at the throat, her gauze veil thrown up about her hat. This new-comer came in quickly, not with the timidity of a stranger. She came out into the centre of the loggia, where the light fell fully around her, and showed her tall slight

figure, the fair hair clustering in her neck, a certain languid grace of movement, which her energetic entrance curiously belied. Frances waited for some form of apology or self-introduction, prepared to be very civil, and feeling in reality pleased and almost grateful for the interruption.

But the young lady made no explanation. She put her hands up to her throat and loosed her cloak with a little sigh of relief. She undid the veil from her hat. "Thank heaven, I have got here at last, free of those people!" she said, putting herself *sans façon* into Mr Waring's chair, and laying her hat upon the little table. Then she looked up at the astonished girl, who stood looking on.

"Are you Frances?" she said; but the question was put in an almost indifferent tone.

"Yes; I am Frances. But I don't know——" Frances was civil to the bottom of her soul, polite, incapable of hurting any one's feelings. She could not say anything disagreeable; she could not demand brutally, Who are you? and what do you want here?

“I thought so,” said the stranger; “and, oddly enough, I saw you this afternoon, and wondered if it could be you. You are a little like mamma.—I am Constance, of course,” she added, looking up with a half-smile. “We ought to kiss each other, I suppose, though we can’t care much about each other, can we?—Where is papa?”

Frances had no breath to speak; she could not say a word. She looked at the new-comer with a gasp. Who was she? And who was papa? Was it some strange mistake which had brought her here? But then the question, “Are you Frances?” showed that it could not be a mistake.

“I beg your pardon,” she said; “I don’t understand. This is—Mr Waring’s. You are looking for—your father?”

“Yes, yes,” cried the other impatiently; “I know. You can’t imagine I should have come here and taken possession if I had not made sure first! You are well enough known in this little place. There was no trouble about it.—And the house looks nice, and this must be a fine view when there is light to see it by.—But

where is papa? They told me he was always to be found at this hour."

Frances felt the blood ebb to her very fingertips, and then rush back like a great flood upon her heart. She scarcely knew where she was standing or what she was saying in her great bewilderment. "Do you mean — *my* father?" she said.

The other girl answered with a laugh: "You are very particular. I mean our father, if you prefer it. Your father—my father. What does it matter?—Where is he? Why isn't he here? It seems he must introduce us to each other. I did not think of any such formality. I thought you would have taken me for granted," she said.

Frances stood thunderstruck, gazing, listening, as if eyes and ears alike fooled her. She did not seem to know the meaning of the words. They could not, she said to herself, mean what they seemed to mean—it was impossible. There must be some wonderful, altogether unspeakable blunder. "I don't understand," she said again, in a piteous tone. "It must be some mistake."

The other girl fixed her eyes upon her in the waning light. She had not paid so much atten-

tion to Frances at first as to the new place and scene. She looked at her now with the air of weighing her in some unseen balance and finding her wanting, with impatience and half contempt. "I thought you would have been glad to see me," she said; "but the world seems just the same in one place as another. Because I am in distress at home you don't want me here."

Then Frances felt herself goaded, galled into the matter-of-fact question, "Who are you?" though she felt that she would not believe the answer she received.

"Who am I? Don't you know who I am? Who should I be but Con? Constance Waring, your sister?—Where," she cried, springing to her feet and stamping one of them upon the ground—"where, *where* is papa?"

The door opened again behind her softly, and Mr Waring with his slow step came out. "Did I hear some one calling for me?" he said.—"Frances, it is not you, surely, that are quarrelling with your visitor?—I beg the lady's pardon; I cannot see who it is."

The stranger turned upon him with impa-

tience in her tone. "It was I who called," she said. "I thought you were sure to be here. Papa, I have always heard that you were kind—a kind man, they all said; that was why I came, thinking—I am Constance!" she added after a pause, drawing herself up and facing him with something of his own gesture and attitude. She was tall, not much less than he was; very unlike little Frances. Her slight figure seemed to draw out as she raised her head and looked at him. She was not a suppliant. Her whole air was one of indignation that she should be subjected to a moment's doubt.

"Constance!" said Mr Waring. The daylight was gone outside; the moon had got behind a fleecy white cloud; behind those two figures there was a gleam of light from within, Domenico having brought in the lamp into the drawing-room. He stepped backward, opening the glass door. "Come in," he said, "to the light."

Frances came last, with a great commotion in her heart, but very still externally. She felt herself to have sunk into quite a subordinate place. The other two, they were the chief

figures. She had now no explanation to ask, no questions to put, though she had a thousand; but everything else was thrown into the background, everything was inferior to this. The chief interest was with the others now.

Constance stepped in after him with a proud freedom of step, the air of one who was mistress of herself and her fate. She went up to the table on which the tall lamp stood, her face on a level with it, fully lighted up by it. She held her hat in her hand, and played with it with a careless yet half-nervous gesture. Her fair hair was short, and clustered in her neck and about her forehead almost like a child's, though she was not like a child. Mr Waring, looking at her, was more agitated than she. He trembled a little; his eyelids were lifted high over his eyes. Her air was a little defiant; but there was no suspicion, only a little uncertainty in his. He put out his hand to her after a minute's inspection. "If you are Constance, you are welcome," he said.

"I don't suppose that you have any doubt I am Constance," said the girl, flinging her hat on the table and herself into a chair. "It is

a very curious way to receive one, though, after such a long journey—such a tiresome long journey,” she repeated, with a voice into which a querulous tone of exhaustion had come.

Mr Waring sat down too in the immediate centre of the light. He had not kissed her nor approached her, save by the momentary touch of their hands. It was a curious way to receive a stranger, a daughter. She lay back in her chair as if wearied out, and tears came to her eyes. “I should not have come, if I had known,” she said, with her lip quivering. “I am very tired. I put up with everything on the journey, thinking, when I came here—— And I am more a stranger here than anywhere!” She paused, choking with the half-hysterical fit of crying which she would not allow to overcome her. “She—knows nothing about me!” she cried, with a sharp accent of pain, as if this was the last blow.

Frances, in her bewilderment, did not know what to do or say. She looked at her father, but his face was dumb, and gave her no suggestion; and then she looked at the new-comer, who lay back with her head against the back

of the chair, her eyes closed, tears forcing their way through her eyelashes, her slender white throat convulsively struggling with a sob. The mind of Frances had been shaken by a sudden storm of feelings unaccustomed; a throb of something which she did not understand, which was jealousy, though she neither knew nor intended it, had gone through her being. She seemed to see herself cast forth from her easy supremacy, her sway over her father's house, deposed from her principal place. And she was only human. Already she was conscious of a downfall. Constance had drawn the interest towards herself—it was she to whom every eye would turn. The girl stood apart for a moment, with that inevitable movement which has been in the bosom of so many since the well-behaved brother of the Prodigal put it in words, “Now that this thy son has come.” Constance, so far as Frances knew, was no prodigal; but she was what was almost worse—a stranger, and yet the honours of the house were to be hers. She stood thus, looking on, until the sight of the suppressed sob, of the closed eyes, of the weary, hopeless atti-

tude, were too much for her. Then it came suddenly into her mind, if she is Constance! Frances had not known half an hour before that there was any Constance who had a right to her sympathy in the world. She gave her father another questioning look, but got no reply from his eyes. Whatever had to be done must be done by herself. She went up to the chair in which her sister lay and touched her on the shoulder. "If we had known you were coming," she said, "it would have been different. It is a little your fault not to let us know. I should have gone to meet you; I should have made your room ready. We have nothing ready, because we did not know."

Constance sat suddenly up in her chair and shook her head, as if to shake off the emotion that had been too much for her. "How sensible you are!" she said. "Is that your character?—She is quite right, isn't she? But I did not think of that. I suppose I am impetuous, as people say. I was unhappy, and I thought you would—receive me with open arms. It is evident *I* am not the sensible one." She said this with still a quiver in her

lip, but also a smile, pushing back her chair, and resuming the unconcerned air which she had worn at first.

“Frances is quite right. You ought to have written and warned us,” said Mr Waring.

“Oh yes; there are so many things that one ought to do.”

“But we will do the best we can for you, now you are here. Mariuccia will easily make a room ready. Where is your baggage? Domenico can go to the railway, to the hotel, wherever you have come from.”

“My box is outside the door. I made them bring it. The woman—is that Mariuccia?—would not take it in. But she let me come in. She was not suspicious. She did not say, ‘If you are Constance.’” And here she laughed, with a sound that grated upon Mr Waring’s nerves. He jumped up suddenly from his chair.

“I had no proof that you were Constance,” he said, “though I believed it. But only your mother’s daughter could reproduce that laugh.”

“Has Frances got it?” the girl cried, with an instant lighting up of opposition in her

eyes; "for I am like you, but she is the image of mamma."

He turned round and looked at Frances, who, feeling that an entire circle of new emotions, unknown to her, had come into being at a bound, stood with a passive, frightened look, spectator of everything, not knowing how to adapt herself to the new turn of affairs.

"By Jove!" her father said, with an air of exasperation she had never seen in him before, "that is true! But I had never noticed it. Even Frances. You've come to set us all by the ears."

"Oh no! I'll tell you, if you like, why I came. Mamma—has been more aggravating than usual. I said to myself you would be sure to understand what that meant. And something arose—I will tell you about it after—a complication, something that mamma insisted I should do, though I had made up my mind not to do it."

"You had better," said her father, with a smile, "take care what ideas on that subject you put into your sister's head."

Constance paused, and looked at Frances with

a look which was half scrutinising, half contemptuous. "Oh, she is not like me," she said. "Mamma was very aggravating, as you know she can be. She wanted me—— But I'll tell you after." And then she began: "I hope, because you live in Italy, papa, you don't think you ought to be a medieval parent; but that sort of thing in Belgravia, you know, is too ridiculous. It was so out of the question that it was some time before I understood. It was not exactly a case of being locked up in my room and kept on bread and water; but something of the sort. I was so much astonished at first, I did not know what to do; and then it became intolerable. I had nobody I could appeal to, for everybody agreed with her. Markham is generally a safe person; but even Markham took her side. So I immediately thought of you. I said to myself, One's father is the right person to protect one. And I knew, of course, that if anybody in the world could understand how impossible it is to live with mamma when she has taken a thing into her head, it would be you."

Waring kept his eye upon Frances while this

was being said, with an almost comic embarrassment. It was half laughable; but it was painful, as so many laughable things are; and there was something like alarm, or rather timidity, in the look. The man looked afraid of the little girl—whom all her life he had treated as a child—and her clear sensible eyes.

“One thinks these things, perhaps, but one does not put them into words,” he said.

“Oh, it is no worse to say them than to think them,” said Constance. “I always say what I mean. And you must know that things went very far—so far that I couldn’t put up with it any longer; so I made up my mind all at once that I would come off to you.”

“And I tell you, you are welcome, my dear. It is so long since I saw you that I could not have recognised you. That is natural enough. But now that you are here—I cannot decide upon the wisdom of the step till I know all the circumstances——”

“Oh, wisdom! I don’t suppose there is any wisdom about it. No one expects wisdom from me. But what could I do? There was nothing else that I could do.”

“At all events,” said Waring, with a little inclination of his head and a smile, as if he were talking to a visitor, Frances said to herself—“Frances and I will forgive any lack of wisdom which has given us—this pleasure.” He laughed at himself as he spoke. “You must expect for a time to feel like a fine lady paying a visit to her poor relations,” he said.

“Oh, I know you will approve of me when you hear everything. Mamma says I am a Waring all over, your own child.”

The sensations with which Frances stood and listened, it would be impossible to describe. Mamma! who was this, of whom the other girl spoke so lightly, whom she had never heard of before? Was it possible that a mother as well as a sister existed for her, as for others, in the unknown world out of which Constance had come? A hundred questions were on her lips, but she controlled herself, and asked none of them. Reflection, which comes so often slowly, almost painfully, to her came now like the flash of lightning. She would not betray to any one, not even to Constance, that she had never known she had a mother. Papa

might be wrong—oh, how wrong he had been!—but she would not betray him. She checked the exclamation on her lips; she subdued her soul altogether, forcing it into silence. This was the secret she had been so anxious to penetrate, which he had kept so closely from her. Why should he have kept it from her? It was evident it had not been kept on the other side. Whatever had happened, had Frances been in trouble, she knew of no one with whom she could have taken refuge; but her sister had known. Her brain was made dizzy by these thoughts. It was open to her now to ask whatever she pleased. The mystery had been made plain; but at the same time her mouth was stopped. She would not confuse her father, nor betray him. It was chiefly from this bewildering sensation, and not, as her father, suddenly grown acute in respect to Frances, thought, from a mortifying consciousness that Constance would speak with more freedom if she were not there, that Frances now spoke. “I think,” she said, “that I had better go and see about the rooms. Mariuccia will not know what to do till I

come; and you will take care of Constance, papa."

He looked at her, hearing in her tone a wounded feeling, a touch of forlorn pride, which perhaps was there, but not so much as he thought; but it was Constance who replied: "Oh yes, we will take care of each other. I have so much to tell him," with a laugh. Frances was aware that there was relief in it, in the prospect of her own absence, but she did not feel it so strongly as her father did. She gave them both a smile, and went away.

"So that is Frances," said the new-found sister, looking after her. "I find her very like mamma. But everybody says I am your child, disposition and all." She rose, and came up to Waring, who had never lessened the distance between himself and her. She put her hand within his arm and held up her face to him. "I am like you. I shall be much happier with you. Do you think you will like having me instead of Frances, father?" She clasped his arm against her in a caressing way, and leant her cheek upon the sleeve of his

velvet coat. "Don't you think you would like to have *me*, father, instead of her?" she said.

A whole panorama of the situation, like a landscape, suddenly flashed before Waring's mind. The spell of this caress, and the confidence she showed of being loved, which is so great a charm, and the impulse of nature, so much as that is worth, drew him towards this handsome stranger, who took possession of him and his affections without a doubt, and pushed away the other from his heart and his side with an impulse which his philosophy said was common to all men—or at least, if that was too sweeping, to all women. But in the same moment came that sense of championship and proprietorship, the one inextricably mingled with the other, which makes us all defend our own whenever assailed. Frances was his own; she was his creation; he had taught her almost everything. Poor little Frances! Not like this girl, who could speak for herself, who could go everywhere, half commanding, half taking with guile every heart that she encountered. Frances would never do that. But she would be true, true as the heavens themselves, and

never falter. By a sudden gleam of perception he saw that, though he had never told her anything of this, though it must have been a revelation of wonder to her, yet that she had not burst forth into any outcries of astonishment, or asked any compromising questions, or done anything to betray him.

His heart went forth to Frances with an infinite tenderness. He had not been a doting father to her; he had even—being himself what the world calls a clever man, much above her mental level—felt himself to condescend a little, and almost upbraided Heaven for giving him so ordinary a little girl. And Constance, it was easy to see, was a brilliant creature, accustomed to take her place in the world, fit to be any man's companion. But the first result of this revelation was to reveal to him, as he had never seen it before, the modest and true little soul which had developed by his side without much notice from him, whom he had treated with such cruel want of confidence, to whom the shock of this evening's disclosures must have been so great, but who, even in the moment of discovery, shielded him. All this

went through his mind with the utmost rapidity. He did not put his new-found child away from him ; but there was less enthusiasm than Constance expected in the kiss he gave her. "I am very glad to have you here, my dear," he said more coldly than pleased her. "But why instead of Frances ? You will be happier both of you for being together."

Constance did not disengage herself with any appearance of disappointment. She perceived, perhaps, that she was not to be so triumphant here as was usually her privilege. She relinquished her father's arm after a minute, not too precipitately, and returned to her chair. "I shall like it, as long as it is possible," she said. "It will be very nice for me having a father and sister instead of a mother and brother. But you will find that mamma will not let you off. She likes to have a girl in the house. She will have her pound of flesh." She threw herself back into her chair with a laugh. "How quaint it all is ; and how beautiful the view must be, and the mountains and the sea ! I shall be very happy here—the world forgetting, by the world forgot—and with you, papa."

CHAPTER VII.

“SHE has come to stay,” Frances said.

“What?” cried Mariuccia, making the small monosyllable sound as if it were the biggest word in her vocabulary.

“She has come to stay. She is my sister; papa’s daughter as much as I am. She has come—home.” Frances was a little uncertain about the word, and it was only “*a casa*” that she said—“to the house,” which means the same.

Mariuccia threw up her arms in astonishment. “Then there has been another signorina all the time!” she cried. “Figure to yourself that I have been with the padrone a dozen years, and I never heard of her before.”

“Papa does not talk very much about his concerns,” said Frances in her faithfulness. “And what we have got to do is to make her

very comfortable. She is very pretty, don't you think? Such beautiful blond hair—and tall. I never shall be tall, I fear. They say she is like papa; but, as is natural, she is much more beautiful than papa."

"Beauty is as you find it," said Mariuccia. "*Carina*, no one will ever be so pretty as our own signorina to Domenico and me.—What is the child doing? She is pulling the things off her own bed.—My angel, you have lost your good sense. You are fluttered and upset by this new arrival. The blue room will be very good for the new young lady. Perhaps she will not stay very long?"

The wish was father to the thought. But Frances took no notice of the suggestion. She said briskly, going on with what she was doing, "She must have my room, Mariuccia. The blue room is *quite* nice; it will do very well for me; but I should like her to feel at home, not to think our house was bare and cold. The blue room would be rather naked, if we were to put her there to-night. It will not be naked for me, for, of course, I am used to it all, and know everything. But when Constance

wakes to-morrow morning and looks round her, and wonders where she is—oh, how strange it all seems!—I wish her to open her eyes upon things that are pretty, and to say to herself, ‘What a delightful house papa has! What a nice room! I feel as if I had been here all my life.’ ”

“Constanza—is that her name? It is rather a common name—not distinguished, like our signorina’s. But it is very good for her, I have no doubt. And so you will give her your own room, that she may be fond of the house, and stay and supplant you? That is what will happen. The good one, the one of gold, gets pushed out of the way. I would not give her my room to make her love the house.”

“I think you would, Mariuccia.”

“No; I do not think so,” said Mariuccia, squaring herself with one arm akimbo. “No; I do not deny that I would probably take some new things into the blue room, and put up curtains. But I am older than you are, and I have more sense. I would not do it. If she gets your room, she will get your place; and she will please everybody, and be admired, and my angel will be put out of the way.”

“I am such a horrid little wretch,” said Frances, “that I thought of that too. It was mean, oh, so mean of me. She is prettier than I am, and taller; and—yes, of course, she must be older too, so you see it is her right.”

“Is she the eldest?” asked Mariuccia.

Frances made a puzzled pause; but she would not let the woman divine that she did not know. “Oh yes; she must be the eldest.—Come quick, Mariuccia; take all these things to the blue room; and now for your clean linen and everything that is nice and sweet.”

Mariuccia did what she was told, but with many objections. She carried on a running murmur of protest all the time. “When there are changes in a family; when it is by the visitation of God, that is another matter. A son or a daughter who is in trouble, who has no other refuge; that is natural; there is nothing to say. But to remain away during a dozen years, and then to come back at a moment’s notice—nay, without even a moment’s notice—in the evening, when all the beds are made up, and demand everything that is comfortable.—I have always thought that there was a great deal

to be said for the poor young signorino of whom the priest speaks, he who had always stayed at home when his brother was amusing himself. *Carina*, you know what I mean."

"I have thought of that too," said Frances. "But my sister is not a prodigal; and papa has never done anything for her. It is all quite different. When we know each other better, it will be delightful always to have a companion, Mariuccia—think how pleasant it will be always to have a companion. I wonder if she will like my pictures?—Now, don't you think the room looks very pretty? I always thought it was a pretty room. Leave the *persiani* open that she may see the sea; and in the morning don't forget to come in and close them before the sun gets hot.—I think that will do now."

"Indeed I hope it will do—after all the trouble you have taken. And I hope the young lady is worthy of it.—But, my angel, what shall I do when I come in to wake her? Does she expect that I can talk her language to her? No, no. And she will know nothing; she will not even be able to say 'Good morning.'"

"I hope so. But if not, you must call me

first, that is all," said Frances cheerfully.—
"Now, don't go to bed just yet; perhaps she will like something—some tea; or perhaps a little supper; or—— I never asked if she had dined."

Mariuccia regarded this possibility with equanimity. She was not afraid of a girl's appetite. But she made a grimace at the mention of the tea. "It is good when one has a cold; oh yes," she said; "but to drink it at all times, as you do! If she wants anything it will be a great deal better to give her a sirop, or a little red wine."

Frances detained Mariuccia as long as she could, and lingered herself still longer after all was ready in the room. She did not know how to go back to the drawing-room, where she had left these two together, to say to each other, no doubt, many things that could be better said in her absence. There was no jealousy, only delicacy, in this; and she had given up her pretty room to her sister, and carried her indispensable belongings to the bare one, with the purest pleasure in making Constance comfortable. Constance! whom an hour ago she had

never heard of, and who now was one of them, nearer to her than anybody, except her father. But all this being done, she had the strangest difficulty in going back, in thrusting herself, as imagination said, between them, and interrupting their talk. To think that it should be such a tremendous matter to return to that familiar room in which the greater part of her life had been passed ! It felt like another world into which she was about to enter, full of unknown elements and conditions which she did not understand. She had not known what it was to be shy in the very limited society she had ever known ; but she was shy now, feeling as if she had not courage to put her hand upon the handle of the door. The familiar creak and jar of it as it opened seemed to her like noisy instruments announcing her approach, which stopped the conversation, as she had divined, and made her father and her sister look up with a little start. Frances could have wished to sink through the floor, to get rid of her own being altogether, as she saw them both give this slight start. Constance was leaning upon the table, the light of the lamp shining full

upon her face, with the air of being in the midst of an animated narrative, which she stopped when Frances entered; and Mr Waring had been listening with a smile. He turned half round and held out his hand to the timid girl behind him. "Come, Frances," he said, "you have been a long time making your preparations. Have you been bringing out the fairest robe for your sister?" It was odd how the parable—which had no signification in their circumstances—haunted them all.

"Your room is quite ready whenever you please. And would you like tea or anything? I ought to have asked if you had dined," Frances said.

"Is she the housekeeper?—How odd!—Do you look after everything?—Dear me! I am afraid, in that case, I shall make a very poor substitute for Frances, papa."

"It is not necessary to think of that," he said hastily, giving her a quick glance.

Frances saw it, with another involuntary, quickly suppressed pang. Of course there would be things that Constance must be warned not to say. And yet it felt as if papa had

deserted her and gone over to the other side. She had not the remotest conception what the warning referred to, or what Constance meant.

“I dined at the hotel,” Constance went on, “with those people whom I travelled with. I suppose you will have to call and be civil. They were quite delighted to think that they would know somebody at Bordighera—some of the inhabitants.—Yes, tea, if you please. And then I think I shall go to bed; for twenty-four hours in the train is very fatiguing, besides the excitement. Don’t you think Frances is very much like mamma? There is a little way she has of setting her chin.—Look there! That is mamma all over. I think they would get on together very well: indeed I feel sure of it.” And again there was a significant look exchanged, which once more went like a sting to Frances’ heart.

“Your sister has been telling me,” said Mr Waring, with a little hesitation, “of a great many people I used to know. You must be very much surprised, my dear; but I will take an opportunity——” He was confused before her, as if he had been before a judge. He gave

her a look which was half shame and half gratitude, sentiments both entirely out of place between him and Frances. She could not bear that he should look at her so.

“Yes, papa,” she said as easily as she could; “I know you must have a great deal to talk of. If Constance will give me her keys I will unpack her things for her.” Both the girls instinctively, oddly, addressed each other through their father, the only link between them, hesitating a little at the familiarity which nature made necessary, but which had no other warrant.

“Oh, isn’t there a maid who can do it?” Constance cried, opening her eyes.

The evening seemed long to Frances, though it was not long. Constance trifled over the tea—which Mariuccia made with much reluctance—for half an hour. But she talked all the time; and as her talk was of people Frances had never heard of, and was mingled with little allusions to what had passed before,—“I told you about him;” “You remember, we were talking of them;” with a constant recurrence of names which to Frances meant nothing at all,—it seemed long to her.

She sat down at the table, and took her knitting, and listened, and tried to look as if she took an interest. She did indeed take a great interest; no one could have been more eager to enter without *arrière-pensée* into the new life thus unfolded before her; and sometimes she was amused and could laugh at the stories Constance was telling; but her chief feeling was that sense of being entirely "out of it"—having nothing to do with it—which makes people who do not understand society feel like so many ghosts standing on the margin, knowing nothing. The feeling was strange and very forlorn. It is an unpleasant experience even for those who are strangers, to whom it is a passing incident; but as the speaker was her sister and the listener her father, Frances felt this more deeply still. Generally in the evening conversation flagged between them. He would have his book, and Frances sometimes had a book too, or a drawing upon which she could work, or at least her knitting. She had felt that the silence which reigned in the room on such occasions was not what ought to be.

It was not like the talk which was supposed to go on in all the novels she had ever read where the people were *nice*. And sometimes she attempted to entertain her father with little incidents in the life of their poor neighbours, or things which Mariuccia had told her; but he listened benevolently, with his finger between the leaves of his book, or even without closing his book, looking up at her over the leaves—only out of kindness to her, not because he was interested; and then silence would fall on them, a silence which was very sweet to Frances, in the midst of which her own little stream of thoughts flowed on continuously, but which now and then she was struck to the heart to think must be very dull for papa.

But to-night it was not dull for him. She listened, and said to herself this was the way to make conversation; and laughed whenever she could, and followed every little gesture of her sister's with admiring eyes. But at the end, Frances, though she would not acknowledge it to herself, felt that she had not been amused. She thought the people in the village were just

as interesting. But then she was not so clever as Constance, and could not do them justice in the same way.

“And now I am going to bed,” Constance said. She rose up in an instant with a rapid movement, as if the thought had only just struck her and she obeyed the impulse at once. There was a freedom about all her movements which troubled and captivated Frances. She had been leaning half over the table, her sleeves, which were a little wide, falling back from her arms, now leaning her chin in the hollow of one hand, now supporting it with both, putting her elbows wherever she pleased. Frances herself had been trained by Mariuccia to very great decorum in respect to attitudes. If she did furtively now and then lean an elbow upon the table, she was aware that it was wrong all the time; and as for legs, she knew it was only men who were permitted to cross them, or to do anything save sit with two feet equal to each other upon the floor. But Constance cared for none of these rules. She rose up abruptly (Mariuccia would have said, as if something had stung her),

almost before she had finished what she was saying. "Show me my room, please," she said, and yawned. She yawned quite freely, naturally, without any attempt to conceal or to apologise for it as if it had been an accident. Frances could not help being shocked, yet neither could she help laughing with a sort of pleasure in this breach of all rules. But Constance only stared, and did not in the least understand why she should laugh.

"Where have you put your sister?" Mr Waring asked.

"I have put her—in the room next to yours, papa; between your room and mine, you know: for I am in the blue room now. There she will not feel strange; she will have people on each side."

"That is to say, you have given her——"

It was Frances' turn now to give a warning glance. "The room I thought she would like best," she said, with a soft but decisive tone. She too had a little imperious way of her own. It was so soft, that a stranger would not have found it out; but in the Palazzo they were all acquainted with it, and no one—not even

Mariuccia—found it possible to say a word after this small trumpet had sounded. Mr Waring accordingly was silenced, and made no further remark. He went with his daughters to the door, and kissed the cheek which Constance held lightly to him. “I shall see you again, papa,” Frances said, in that same little determined voice.

Mr Waring did not make any reply, but shrank a little aside, to let her pass. He looked like a man who was afraid. She had spared him; she had not betrayed the ignorance in which he had brought her up; but now the moment of reckoning was near, and he was afraid of Frances. He went back into the *salone*, and walked up and down with a restlessness which was natural enough, considering how all the embers of his life had been raked up by this unexpected event. He had lived in absolute quiet for fourteen long years: a strange life—a life which might have been supposed to be impossible for a man still in the heyday of his strength; but yet, as it appeared, a life which suited him, which he preferred to others more natural. To settle

down in an Italian village with a little girl of six for his sole companion — when he came to think of it, nothing could be more unnatural, more extraordinary; and yet he had liked it well enough, as well as he could have liked anything at that crisis of his fate. He was the kind of man who, in other circumstances, in another age, would have made himself a monk, and spent his existence very placidly in illuminating manuscripts. He had done something as near this as is possible to an Englishman not a Roman Catholic, of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, Waring had no ecclesiastical tendencies, or even in the nineteenth century he might have found out for himself some pseudo-monkery in which he could have been happy. As it was, he had retired with his little girl, and on the whole had been comfortable enough. But now the little girl had grown up, and required to have various things accounted for; and the other individuals who had claims upon him, whom he thought he had shaken off altogether, had turned up again, and had to be dealt with. The monk had an easy time of it in com-

parison. He who has but himself to think of may manage himself, if he has good luck ; but the responsibility of others on your shoulders is a terrible drawback to tranquillity. A little girl ! That seemed the simplest of all things. It had never occurred to him that she would form a link by which all his former burdens might be drawn back ; or that she, more wonderful still, should ever arise and demand to know why. But both of these impossible things had happened.

Waring walked about the *salone*. He opened the glass door and stepped out into the loggia, into the tranquil shining of the moon, which lit up all the blues of the sea, and kindled little silver lamps all over the quivering palms. How quiet it was ! and yet that tranquil nature lying unmoved, taking whatever came of good or evil, did harm in a far more colossal way than any man could do. The sea, then looking so mild, would suddenly rise up and bring havoc and destruction worse than an army ; yet next day smile again, and throw its spray into the faces of the children, and lie like a harmless thing under the light. But a man

could not do this. A man had to give an account of all that he had done, whether it was good or whether it was evil,—if not to God—which on the whole was the easiest, for God knew all about it, how little harm had been intended, how little anything had been intended, how one mistake involved another,—if not to God—why, to some one harder to face; perhaps to one's little girl.

He came back from the loggia and the moonlight and nature, which, all of them, were so indifferent to what was happening to him, with a feeling that the imperfect human lamp which so easily got out of gear—as easily as a man—was a more appropriate light for his disturbed soul; and met Frances with her brown eyes waiting for him at the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

“It is not because of this only, papa—I wanted before to speak to you. I was waiting in the loggia for you, when Constance came.”

“What did you want, Frances? Oh, I quite acknowledge that you have a right to inquire. I hoped, perhaps, I might be spared to-night; I am rather exhausted—to-night.”

Frances dropped the hand which she had laid upon his arm. “It shall be exactly as you please, papa. I seem to know a great deal—oh, a great deal more than I knew at dinner. I don’t think I am the same person; and I thought it might save us all trouble if you would tell me—as much as you think I ought to know.”

She had sat down in her usual place, in her careful little modest pose, a little stiff, a little

prim—the training of Mariuccia. After Constance, there was something in the attitude of Frances which made her father smile, though he was in no mood for smiling; and it was clear that he could not, that he ought not to escape. He would not sit down, however, and meet her eye. He stood by the table for a few minutes, with his eyes upon the books, turning them over, as if he were looking for something. At last he said, but without looking up, “There is nothing very dreadful to tell; no guilty secret, though you may suppose so. Your mother and I——”

“Then I have really a mother, and she is living?” the girl cried.

He looked at her for a moment. “I forgot that for a girl of your age that means a great deal—I hadn’t thought of it. Perhaps if you knew—— Yes; you have got a mother, and she is living. I suppose that seems a very wonderful piece of news?”

Frances did not say anything. The water came into her eyes. Her heart beat loudly, yet softly, against her young bosom. She had known it, so that she was not surprised. The

surprise had been broken by Constance's careless talk, by the wonder, the doubt, the sense of impossibility, which had gradually yielded to a conviction that it must be so. Her feeling was that she would like to go now, without delay, without asking any more questions, to her mother. Her mother! and he hadn't thought before how much that meant to a girl—of her age!

Mr Waring was a little disconcerted by having no answer. Of course it meant a great deal to a girl; but still, not so much as to make her incapable of reply. He felt a little annoyed, disturbed, perhaps jealous, as Frances herself had been. It was with difficulty that he resumed again; but it had to be done.

"Your mother and I," he said, taking up the books again, opening and shutting them, looking at the title-page now of one, now of another, "did not get on very well. I don't know who was in fault—probably both. She had been married before. She had a son whom you hear Constance speak of as Markham. Markham has been at the bottom of all the trouble. He drove me out of my senses when he was a

boy. Now he is a man : so far as I can make out it is he that has disturbed our peace again—hunted us up, and sent Constance here. If you ever meet Markham—and of course now you are sure to meet him—beware of him.” Here he made a pause again, and looked with great seriousness at the book in his hand, turning the leaf to finish a sentence which was continued on the next page.

“I beg your pardon, papa,” said Frances ; “I am afraid I am very stupid. What relation is Markham to me ?”

He looked at her for a moment, then threw down the book with some violence on the table, as if it were the offender. “He is your step-brother,” he said.

“My—brother ? Then I have a brother too ?” After a little pause she added, “It is very wonderful, papa, to come into a new world like this all at once. I want—to draw my breath.”

“It is my fault that it comes upon you all at once. I never thought—— You were a very small child when I brought you away. You forgot them all, as was natural. I did

not at first know how entirely a child forgets ; and then—then it seemed a pity to disturb your mind, and perhaps set you longing for—what it was impossible for you to obtain.”

It surprised him a little that Frances did not breathe a syllable of reproach. She said nothing. In her imagination she was looking back over these years, wondering how it would have been had she known. Would life ever be the same, now that she did know ? The world seemed to open up round her, so much greater, wider, more full than she had thought. She had not thought much on the subject. Life in Bordighera was more limited even than life in an English village. The fact that she did not belong to the people among whom she had spent all these years, made a difference ; and her father's recluse habits, the few people he cared to know, the stagnation of his life, made a greater difference still. Frances had scarcely felt it until that meeting with the Mannerings, which put so many vague ideas into her mind. A child does not naturally inquire into the circumstances which have surrounded it all its life. It was natural to her to live in this

retired place, to see nobody, to make amusements and occupations for herself—to know no one more like herself than Tasie Durant. Had she even possessed any girl-friends living the natural life of youth, that might have inspired a question or two. But she knew no girls—except Tasie, whose girlhood was a sort of fossil, and who might almost have been the mother of Frances. She saw indeed the village girls, but it did not occur to her to compare herself with them. Familiar as she was with all their ways, she was still a *forestière*—one of the barbarous people, English, a word which explains every difference. Frances did not quite know in what the peculiarity and eccentricity of the English consisted; but she, too, recognised with all simplicity that, being English, she was different. Now it came suddenly to her mind that the difference was not anything generic and general, but that it was her own special circumstances that had been unlike all the rest. There had been a mother all the time; another girl, a sister, like herself. It made her brain whirl.

She sat quite silent, thinking it all over, not

perceiving her father's embarrassment—thinking less of him, indeed, than of all the wonderful new things that seemed to crowd about her. She did not blame him. She was not thinking enough of him to blame him; her mind was quite sufficiently occupied by her discoveries. As she had taken him all her life without examination, she continued to take him. He was her father; that was enough. It did not occur to her to ask herself whether what he had done was right or wrong. Only, it was all very strange. The old solid earth had gone from under her feet, and the old order of things had been overthrown. She was looking out upon a world not realised—a spectator of something like the throes of creation, seeing the new landscape tremble and roll into place, the heights and hollows all changing; there was a great deal of excitement in it, both pain and pleasure. It occupied her so fully, that he fell back into a secondary place.

But this did not occur to Waring. He had not realised that it could be possible. He felt himself the centre of the system in which his

little daughter lived, and did not understand how she could ignore him. He thought her silence—the silence of amazement, and excitement, and of that curious spectatorship—was the silence of reproach, and that her mind was full of a sense of wrong, which only duty kept in check. He felt himself on his trial before her. Having said all that he had to say, he remained silent, expecting her response. If she had given vent to an indignant exclamation, he would have been relieved; he would have allowed that she had a right to be indignant. But her silence was more than he could bear. He searched through the recesses of his own thoughts; but for the moment he could not find any further excuse for himself. He had done it for the best. Probably she would not see that. Waring was well enough acquainted with the human mind to know that every individual sees such a question from his or her own point of view: and he was prepared to find that his daughter would be unable to perceive what was so plain to him. But still he was aware that he had done it for the best. After a while the silence became so irksome to him that he felt compelled to break it

and resume his explanations. If she would not say anything, there were a number of things which he might say.

“It is a pity,” he said, “that it has all broken upon you so suddenly. If I could have divined that Constance would have taken such a step—— To tell you the truth, I have never realised Constance at all,” he added, with an impulse towards the daughter he knew. “She was of course a mere child : to see her so independent, and with so distinct a will of her own, is very bewildering. I assure you, Frances, if it is wonderful to you, it is scarcely less wonderful to me.”

There was something in his tone that made her lift her eyes to him ; and to see him stand there so embarrassed, so subdued, so much unlike the father who, though very kind and tender, had always been perhaps a little condescending, patronising, towards the girl, whom he scarcely recognised as an independent entity, went to her heart. She could not tell him not to be frightened—not to look at her with that guilty, apologetic look, which altogether reversed their ordinary relationship ; but it added a pang

to her bewilderment. She asked hastily, by way of concealing this uncomfortable change, a question which she thought he would have no difficulty in answering—"Is Constance much older than I am, papa?"

He gave a sort of furtive smile, as if he had no right to smile in the circumstances. "I don't wonder at your question. She has seen a great deal more of the world. But if there is a minute or two between you, I don't know which has it. There is no elder or younger in the case. You are twins, though no one would think so."

This gave Frances a further shock—though why, it would be impossible to say. The blood rushed to her face. "She must think me—a very poor little thing," she said, in a hurried tone. "I never knew—I have no friend except Tasie—to show me what girls might be." The thought mortified her in an extraordinary way; it brought a sudden gush of salt tears—tears quite different from those which had welled to her eyes when he told her of her mother. Constance, who was so different, would despise her—Constance, who knew exactly all about it, and that Frances was as old, perhaps a few

minutes older than she. It is always difficult to divine what form pride will take. This was the manner in which it affected Frances. The same age! and yet the one an accomplished woman, judging for herself—and the other not much more than a child.

“You do yourself injustice,” said Mr Waring, somewhat rehabilitated by the mortification of Frances. “Nobody could think you a poor little thing. You have not the same knowledge of the world. Constance has been very differently brought up. I think my training a great deal better than what she has had,” he added quickly, with a mingled desire to cheer and restore self-confidence to Frances, and to reassert himself after his humiliation. He felt what he said; and yet, as was natural, he said a little more than he felt. “I must tell you,” he said, in this new impulse, “that your mother is—a much more important person than I am. She is a great deal richer. The marriage was supposed to be much to my advantage.”

There was a smile on his face which Frances, looking up suddenly, warned by a certain change of tone, did not like to see. She kept her eyes

upon him instinctively, she could not tell why, with a look which had a certain influence upon him, though he did not well understand it either. It meant that the unknown woman of whom he spoke was the girl's mother—her mother—one of whom no unbefitting word was to be said. It checked him in a quite curious unexpected way. When he had spoken of her, which he had done very rarely since they parted, it had been with a sense that he was free to characterise her as he thought she deserved. But here he was stopped short. That very evening he had said things to Constance of her mother which in a moment he felt that he dared not say to Frances. The sensation was a very strange one. He made a distinct pause, and then he said hurriedly, "You must not for a moment suppose that there was anything wrong; there is no story that you need be afraid of hearing—nothing, neither on her side nor mine—nothing to be ashamed of."

All at once Frances grew very pale; her eyes opened wide; she gazed at him with speechless horror. The idea was altogether new to her artless mind. It flashed through his that Constance

would not have been at all surprised—that probably she would have thought it “nice of him” to exonerate his wife from all moral shortcoming. The holy ignorance of the other brought a sensation of shame to Waring, and at the same time a sensation of pride. Nothing could more clearly have proved the superiority of his training. She would have felt no consternation, only relief at this assurance, if she had been all her life in her mother’s hands.

“It is a great deal to say, however, though you are too inexperienced to know. The whole thing was incompatibility—incompatibility of temper, and of ideas, and of tastes, and of fortune even. I could not, you may suppose, accept advantages purchased with my predecessor’s money, or take the good of his rank through my wife; and she would not come down in the world to my means and to my name. It was an utter mistake altogether. We should have understood each other beforehand. It was impossible that we could get on. But that was all. There was probably more talk about it than if there had been really more to talk about.”

Frances rose up with a little start. "I think, perhaps," she said, "I don't want you to tell me any more."

"Well—perhaps you are right." But he was startled by her quick movement. "I did not mean to say anything that could shock you. If you are to hear anything at all, the truth is what you must hear. But you must not blame me over-much, Frances. Your very impatience of what I have been saying will explain to you why I thought that to say nothing—as long as I could help it—was the best."

Her hand trembled a little as she lighted her candle, but she made no comment. "Good night, papa. To-morrow it will all seem different. Everything is strange to-night."

He put his hands upon her shoulders and looked down into the little serious face, the face that had never been so serious before. "Don't think any worse of me, Frances, than you can help."

Her eyes opened wider with astonishment. "Think of you, worse—— But, papa, I am not thinking of you at all," she said, simply; "I am thinking of *it*."

Waring had gone through a number of depressing and humbling experiences during the course of the evening, but this was the unkindest of all—and it was so natural. Frances was no critic. She was not thinking of his conduct, which was the first thing in his mind, but of IT, the revelation which had been made to her. He might have perceived that, or divined it, if he had not been occupied by this idea, which did not occupy her at all—the thought of how he personally had come through the business. He gave a little faltering laugh at himself as he stooped and kissed her. “That’s all right,” he said. “Good night ; but don’t let IT interfere with your sleep. To-morrow everything will look different, as you say.”

Frances turned away with her light in her hand ; but before she had reached the door, returned again. “I think I ought to tell you, papa, that I am sure the Durants know. They said a number of strange things to me yesterday, which I think I understand now. If you don’t mind, I would rather let them suppose that I knew all the time ; otherwise,

it looks as if you thought you could not trust me."

"I could trust you," he said, with a little fervour,—“my dear child, my dear little girl—I would trust you with my life.”

Was there a faint smile in the little girl's limpid simple eyes? He thought so, and it disconcerted him strangely. She made no response to that protestation, but with a little nod of her head went away. Waring sat down at the table again, and began to think it all over from the beginning. He was sore and aching, like a man who has fallen from a height. He had fallen from the pedestal on which, to Frances, he had stood all these years. She might not be aware of it even—but he was. And he had fallen from those Elysian fields of peace in which he had been dwelling for so long. They had not, perhaps, seemed very Elysian while he was secure of their possession. They had been monotonous in their stillness, and wearied his soul. But now that he looked back upon them, a new cycle having begun,

they seemed to him like the very home of peace. He had not done anything to forfeit this tranquillity; and yet it was over, and he stood once more on the edge of an agitated and disturbed life. He was a man who could bear monotony, who liked his own way, yet liked that bondage of habit which is as hard as iron to some souls. He liked to do the same things at the same time day after day, and to be undisturbed in doing them. But now all his quiet was over. Constance would have a thousand requirements such as Frances had never dreamed of; and her brother no doubt would soon turn up—that step-brother whom Waring had never been able to tolerate even when he was a child. She might even come Herself—who could tell?

When this thought crossed his mind, he got up hastily and left the *salone*, leaving the lamp burning, as Domenico found it next morning, to his consternation—a symbol of Chaos come again—burning in the daylight. Mr Waring almost fled to his room and locked his door in the horror of that suggestion.

And this was not only because the prospect of such a visit disturbed him beyond measure, but because he had not yet made a clean breast of it. Frances did not yet know all.

Frances for her part went to the blue room, and opened the *persiani*, and sat looking out upon the moonlight for some time before she went to bed. The room was bare; she missed her pictures, which Constance had taken no notice of—the Madonna that had been above her head for so many years, and which had vaguely appeared to her as a symbol of the mother who had never existed in her life. Now there seemed less need for the Madonna. The bare walls had pictures all over them—pictures of a new life. In imagination, no one is shy, or nervous, or strange. She let the new figures move about her freely, and delighted herself with familiar pictures of them and the changes that must accompany them. She was not like her father, afraid of changes. She thought of the new people, the new combinations, the quickened life: and the thought made her smile. They

would come, and she would make the house gay and bright to receive them. Perhaps some time, surrounded by this new family that belonged to her, she might even be taken "home." The thought was delightful notwithstanding the thrill of excitement in it. But still there was something which Frances did not know.

CHAPTER IX.

“WHAT is this I hear about Waring?” said General Gaunt, walking out upon the loggia, where the Durants were sitting, on the same memorable afternoon on which all that has been above related occurred. The General was dressed in loosely fitting light-coloured clothes. It was one of the recommendations of the Riviera to him that he could wear out there all his old Indian clothes, which would have been useless to him at home. He was a very tall old man, very yellow, nay, almost greenish in the complexion, extremely spare, with a fine old white moustache, which had an immense effect upon his brown face. The well-worn epigram might be adapted in his case to say that nobody ever was so fierce as the General looked; and yet he was at bottom rather a mild

old man, and had never hurt anybody, except the sepoy in the Mutiny, all his life. His head was covered with a broad light felt hat, which, soft as it was, took an aggressive cock when he put it on. He held his gloves dangling from his hand with the air of having been in too much haste to put them to their proper use. And his step, as he stepped off the carpet upon the marble of the loggia, sounded like that of an alert officer who has just heard that the enemy has made a reconnaissance in force two miles off, and that there is no time to lose. "What is this I hear about Waring?" he said.

"Yes, indeed!" cried Mrs Durant.

"It is a most remarkable story," said his Reverence, shaking his head.

"But what is it?" asked the General. "I found Mrs Gaunt almost crying when I went in. What she said was, 'Charles, we have been nourishing a viper in our bosoms.' I am not addicted to metaphor, and I insisted upon plain English; and then it all came out. She told me Waring was an impostor, and had been taking us all in; that some old friend of his had been here, and had told you. Is that true?"

“My dear!” said Mr Durant in a tone of remonstrance.

“Well, Henry! you never said it was to be kept a secret. It could not possibly be kept a secret—so few of us here, and all so intimate.”

“Then he is an impostor?” said General Gaunt.

“Oh, my dear General, that’s too strong a word. Henry, you had better tell the General, your own way.”

The old clergyman had been shaking his head all the time. He was dying to tell all that he knew, yet he could not but improve the occasion. “Oh, ladies, ladies!” he said, “when there is anything to be told, the best of women is not to be trusted. But, General, our poor friend is no impostor. He never said he was a widower.”

“It’s fortunate we’ve none of us girls——” the General began; then with a start, “I forgot Miss Tasie; but she’s a girl—a girl in ten thousand,” he added, with a happy inspiration. Tasie, who was still seated behind the teacups, give him a smile in reply.

“Poor dear Mr Waring,” she said, “whether

he is a widower or has a wife, it does not matter much. Nobody can call Mr Waring a flirt. He might be any one's grandfather from his manner. I cannot see that it matters a bit."

"Not so far as we are concerned, thank heaven!" said her mother, with the air of one whose dear child has escaped a danger. "But I don't think it is quite respectable for one of our small community to have a wife alive and never to let any one know."

"I understand, a most excellent woman; besides being a person of rank," said Mr Durant. "It has disturbed me very much—though, happily, as my wife says, from no private motive." Here the good man paused, and gave vent to a sigh of thankfulness, establishing the impression that his ingenuous Tasie had escaped as by a miracle from Waring's wiles; and then he continued, "I think some one should speak to him on the subject. He ought to understand that now it is known, public opinion requires—— Some one should tell him——"

"There is no one so fit as a clergyman," the General said.

"That is true, perhaps, in the abstract; but

with our poor friend—— There are some men who will not take advice from a clergyman.”

“O Henry! do him justice. He has never shown anything but respect to you.”

“I should say that a man of the world, like the General——”

“Oh, not I,” cried the General, getting up hurriedly. “No, thank you; I never interfere with any man’s affairs. That’s your business, Padre. Besides, I have no daughter: whether he is married or not is nothing to me.”

“Nor to us, heaven be praised!” said Mrs Durant; and then she added, “It is not for ourselves; it is for poor little Frances, a girl that has never known a mother’s care! How much better for her to be with her mother, and properly introduced into society, than living in that hugger-mugger way, without education, without companions! If it were not for Tasie, the child would never see a creature near her own age.”

“And I am much older than Frances,” said Tasie, rather to heighten the hardship of the situation than from any sense that this was true.

“Decidedly the Padre ought to talk to him,” said the Anglo-Indian. “He ought to be made to feel that everybody at the station—— Wife all right, do you know? Bless me! if the wife is all right, what does the man mean? Why can’t they quarrel peaceably, and keep up appearances, as we all do?”

“Oh no—not all; *we* never quarrel.”

“Not for a long time, my love.”

“Henry, you may trust to my memory. Not for about thirty years. We had a little disagreement then about where we were to go for the summer. Oh, I remember it well—the agony it cost me! Don’t say ‘as we *all* do,’ General, for it would not be true.”

“You are a pair of old turtle-doves,” quoth the General. “All the more reason why you should talk to him, Padre. Tell him he’s come among us on false pretences, not knowing the damage he might have done. I always thought he was a queer hand to have the education of a little girl.”

“He taught her Latin; and that woman of theirs, Mariuccia, taught her to knit. That’s all she knows. And her mother all the time in

such a fine position, able to do anything for her! Oh, it is of Frances I think most!"

"It is quite evident," said the General, "that Mr Durant must interfere."

"I think it very likely I shall do no good. A man of the world, a man like that——"

"There is no such great harm about the man."

"And he is very good to Frances," said Tasie, almost under her breath.

"I daresay he meant no harm," said the General, "if that is all. Only, he should be warned; and if anything can be done for Frances—— It is a pity she should see nobody, and never have a chance of establishing herself in life."

"She ought to be introduced into society," said Mrs Durant. "As for establishing herself in life, that is in the hands of Providence, General. It is not to be supposed that such an idea ever enters into a girl's mind—unless it is put there, which is so often the case."

"The General means," said Tasie, "that seeing people would make her more fit to be a companion for her papa. Frances is a dear girl; but it is quite true—she is wanting in conversation.

They often sit a whole evening together and scarcely speak."

"She is a nice little thing," said the General, energetically—"I always thought so; and never was at a dance, I suppose, or a junketing of any description, in her life. To be sure, we are all old duffers in this place. The Padre should interfere."

"If I could see it was my duty," said Mr Durant.

"I know what you mean," said General Gaunt. "I'm not too fond of interference myself. But when a man has concealed his antecedents, and they have been found out. And then the little girl——"

"Yes: it is Frances I think of most," said Mr Durant.

It was at last settled among them that it was clearly the clergyman's business to interfere. He had been tolerably certain to begin with, but he liked the moral support of what he called a consensus of opinion. Mr Durant was not so reluctant as he professed to be. He had not much scope for those social duties which, he was of opinion,

were not the least important of a clergyman's functions; and though there was a little excitement in the uncertainty from Sunday to Sunday how many people would be at church, what the collection would be, and other varying circumstances, yet the life of the clergyman at Bordighera was monotonous, and a little variety was welcome. In other chaplaincies which Mr Durant had held, he had come in contact with various romances of real life. These were still the days of gaming, when every German bath had its *tapis vert* and its little troupe of tragedies. But the Riviera was very tranquil, and Bordighera had just been found out by the invalid and the pleasure-seeker. It was monotonous: there had been few deaths, even among the visitors, which are always varieties in their way for the clergyman, and often are the means of making acquaintances both useful and agreeable to himself and his family. But as yet there had not even been many deaths. This gave great additional excitement to what is always exciting, for a small community—the cropping up under their very noses, in their own immediate circle, of a mystery, of a dis-

covery which afforded boundless opportunity for talk. The first thing naturally that had affected Mr and Mrs Durant was the miraculous escape of Tasie, to whom Mr Waring *might* have made himself agreeable, and whose peace of mind might have been affected, for anything that could be said to the contrary. They said to each other that it was a hair-breadth escape; although it had not occurred previously to any one that any sort of mutual attraction between Mr Waring and Tasie was possible.

And then the other aspects of the case became apparent. Mr Durant felt now that to pass it over, to say nothing about the matter, to allow Waring to suppose that everything was as it had always been, was impossible. He and his wife had decided this without the intervention of General Gaunt; but when the General appeared—the only other permanent pillar of society in Bordighera—then there arose that consensus which made further steps inevitable. Mrs Gaunt looked in later, after dinner, in the darkening; and she, too, was of opinion that some-

thing must be done. She was affected to tears by the thought of that mystery in their very midst, and of what the poor (unknown) lady must have suffered, deserted by her husband, and bereft of her child. "He might at least have left her her child," she said, with a sob; and she was fully of opinion that he should be spoken to without delay, and that they should not rest till Frances had been restored to her mother. She thought it was "a duty" on the part of Mr Durant to interfere. The consensus was thus unanimous; there was not a dissentient voice in the entire community. "We will sleep upon it," Mr Durant said. But the morning brought no further light. They were all agreed more strongly than ever that Waring ought to be spoken to, and that it was undeniably a duty for the clergyman to interfere.

Mr Durant accordingly set out before it was too late, before the mid-day breakfast, which is the coolest and calmest moment of the day, the time for business, before social intercourse is supposed to begin. He was very carefully brushed from his hat to his shoes, and was indeed a very

agreeable example of a neat old clerical gentleman. Ecclesiastical costume was much more easy in those days. It was before the era of long coats and soft hats, when a white tie was the one incontrovertible sign of the clergyman who did not think of calling himself a priest. He was indeed, having been for a number of years located in Catholic countries, very particular not to call himself a priest, or to condescend to any garb which could recall the *soutane* and three-cornered hat of the indigenous clergy. His black clothes were spotless, but of the ordinary cut, perhaps a trifle old-fashioned. But yet neither *soutane* nor *berretta* could have made it more evident that Mr Durant, setting out with an ebony stick and black gloves, was an English clergyman going mildly but firmly to interfere. Had he been met with in the wilds of Africa, even there mistake would have been impossible. In his serious eye, in the aspect of the corners of his mouth, in a certain air of gentle determination diffused over his whole person, this was apparent. It made a great impression upon Domenico when he opened the door. After what had

happened yesterday, Domenico felt that anything might happen. "Lo, this man's brow, like to a title leaf, foretells the nature of the tragic volume," he said to Mariuccia—at least if he did not use these words, his meaning was the same. He ushered the English pastor into the room which Mr Waring occupied as a library, with bated breath. "Master is going to catch it," was what, perhaps, a light-minded Cockney might have said. But Domenico was a serious man, and did not trifle.

Waring's library was, like all the rooms of his suite, an oblong room, with three windows and as many doors, opening into the dining-room on one hand, and the ante-room on the other. It had the usual indecipherable fresco on the roof, and the walls on one side were half clothed with bookcases. Not a very large collection of books, and yet enough to make a pretty show, with their old gilding, and the dull white of the vellum in which so many were bound. It was a room in which he spent the most of his time, and it had been made comfortable according to the notions of comfort prevailing in these regions. There was a square of carpet under his

writing-table. His chair was a large old *fau-teuil*, covered with faded damask; and curtains, also faded, were festooned over all the windows and doors. The *persiani* were shut to keep out the sun, and the cool atmosphere had a greenish tint. Waring, however, did not look so peaceful as his room. He sat with his chair pushed away from the table, reading what seemed to be a novel. He had the air of a man who had taken refuge there from some embarrassment or annoyance; not the tranquil look of a man occupied in so-called studies needing leisure, with his note-books at hand, and pen and ink within reach. Such a man is usually very glad to be interrupted in the midst of his self-imposed labours, and Waring's first movement was one of satisfaction. He threw down the book, with an apology for having ever taken it up in the half-ashamed, half-violent way in which he got rid of it. Don't suppose I care for such rubbish, his gesture seemed to say. But the aspect of Mr Durant changed his look of welcome. He rose hurriedly, and gave his visitor a chair. "You are early out," he said.

“Yes ; the morning, I find, is the best time. Even after the sun is down, it is never so fresh in the evening. Especially for business, I find it the best time.”

“That means, I suppose,” said Waring, “that your visit this morning means business, and not mere friendship, as I had supposed?”

“Friendship always, I hope,” said the tidy old clergyman, smoothing his hat with his hand ; “but I don’t deny it is something more serious : a—a—question I want to ask you, if you don’t mind——”

Just at this moment, in the next room there rose a little momentary and pleasant clamour of voices and youthful laughter ; two voices certainly—Frances and another. This made Mr Durant prick up his ears. “You have—visitors?” he said.

“Yes. I will answer to the best of my ability,” said Waring, with a smile.

Now was the time when Mr Durant realised the difficult nature of his mission. At home in his own house, especially in the midst of the consensus of opinion, with everybody encouraging him and pressing upon him the fact that

it was "a duty," the matter seemed easy enough. But when he found himself in Waring's house, looking a man in the face with whose concerns he had really no right to interfere, and who had not at all the air of a man ready to be brought to the confessional, Mr Durant's confidence failed him. He faltered a little; he looked at his very unlikely penitent, and then he looked at the hat which he was turning round in his hands, but which gave him no courage. Then he cleared his throat. "The question is—quite a simple one," he said. "There can be no doubt of your ability—to answer. I am sure you will forgive me if I say, to begin with——"

"One moment. Is this question—which seems to trouble you—about my affairs or yours?"

Mr Durant's clear complexion betrayed something like a flush. "That is just what I want to explain. You will acknowledge, my dear Waring, that you have been received here—well, there is not very much in our power—but with every friendly feeling, every desire to make you one of us."

"All this preface shows me that it is I who

have been found wanting. You are quite right; you have been most hospitable and kind—to myself, almost too much so; to my daughter, you have given all the society she has ever known.”

“I am glad, truly glad, that you think we have done our part. My dear friend, was it right, then, when we opened our arms to you so unsuspectingly, to come among us in a false character—under false colours?”

“Stop!” said Waring, growing pale. “This is going a little too far. I suppose I understand what you mean. Mannering, who calls himself my old friend, has been here; and as he could not hold his tongue if his life depended upon it, he has told you—— But why you should accuse me of holding a false position, of coming under false colours—which was what you said——”

“Waring!” said the clergyman, in a voice of mild thunder, “did you never think, when you came here, comparatively a young, and—well, still a good-looking man—did you never think that there might be some susceptible heart—some woman’s heart——”

“Good heavens!” cried Waring, starting to his feet, “I never supposed for a moment——”

“——Some young creature,” Mr Durant continued, solemnly, “whom it might be my duty and your duty to guard from deception; but who naturally, taking you for a widower——”

Waring’s countenance of horror was unspeakable. He stood up before his table like a little boy who was about to be caned. Exclamations of dismay fell unconsciously from his lips. “Sir! I never thought——”

Mr Durant paused to contemplate with pleasure the panic he had caused. He put down his hat and rubbed together his little fat white hands. “By the blessing of Providence,” he said, drawing a long breath, “that danger has been averted. I say it with thankfulness. We have been preserved from any such terrible result. But had things been differently ordered—think, only think! and be grateful to Providence.”

The answer which Waring made to this speech was to burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. He seemed incapable of recovering his gravity. As soon as he paused, exhausted,

to draw breath, he was off again. The suggestion, when it ceased to be horrible, became ludicrous beyond description. He quavered forth "I beg your pardon" between the fits, which Mr Durant did not at all like. He sat looking on at the hilarity very gravely without a smile.

"I did not expect so much levity," he said.

"I beg your pardon," cried the culprit, with tears running down his cheeks. "Forgive me. If you will recollect that the character of a gay Lothario is the last one in the world——"

"It is not necessary to be a gay Lothario," returned the clergyman. "Really, if this is to continue, it will be better that I should withdraw. Laughter was the last thing I intended to produce."

"It is not a bad thing, and it is not an indulgence I am given to. But I think, considering what a very terrible alternative you set before me, we may be very glad it has ended in laughter. Mr Durant," continued Waring, "you have only anticipated an explanation I intended to make. Mannering is an ass."

"I am sure he is a most respectable member of society," said Mr Durant, with much gravity.

"So are many asses. I have some one else to present to you, who is very unlike Manner-
ing, but who betrays me still more distinctly. Constance, I want you here."

The old clergyman gazed, not believing his eyes, as there suddenly appeared in the doorway the tall figure of a girl who had never been seen as yet in Bordighera—a girl who was very simply dressed, yet who had an air which the old gentleman, acquainted, as he flattered himself, with the air of fine people, could not ignore. She stood with a careless grace, returning slightly, not without a little of that impertinence of a fine lady which is so impressive to the crowd, his salutation. "Did you want me, papa?" she quietly asked.

CHAPTER X.

THE revelation which thus burst upon Mr Durant was known throughout the length and breadth of Bordighera, as that good man said, before the day was out. The expression was not so inappropriate as might be at first supposed, considering the limited society to which the fact that Mr Waring had a second daughter was of any particular interest; for the good chaplain's own residence was almost at the extremity of the Marina, and General Gaunt's on the highest point of elevation among the olive gardens; while the only other English inhabitants were in the hotels near the beach, and consisted of a landlady, a housekeeper, and the highly respectable person who had charge of the stables at the Bellevue. This little inferior world

was respectfully interested but not excited by the new arrival.

But to Mrs Durant and Tasie it was an event of the first importance; and Mrs Gaunt was at first disposed to believe that it was a revelation of further wickedness, and that there was no telling where these discoveries might end. "We shall be hearing that he has a son next," she said. They had a meeting in the afternoon to talk it over; and it really did appear at first that the new disclosure enhanced the enormity of the first—for, naturally, the difference between a widower and a married man is aggravated by the discovery that the deceiver pretending to have only one child has really "a family." At the first glance the ladies were all impressed by this; though afterwards, when they began to think of it, they were obliged to admit that the conclusion perhaps was not very well founded. And when it turned out that Frances and the new-comer were twins, that altogether altered the question, and left them, though they were by no means satisfied, without anything further to say.

While all this went on outside the Palazzo, there was much going on within it that was calculated to produce difficulty and embarrassment. Mr Waring, with a consciousness that he was acting a somewhat cowardly part, ran away from it altogether, and shut himself up in his library, and left his daughters to make acquaintance with each other as they best could. He was, as has been said, by no means sufficiently at his ease to return to what he called his studies, the ordinary occupations of his life. He had run away, and he knew it. He went so far as to turn the key in one door, so that, whatever happened, he could only be invaded from one side, and sat down uneasily in the full conviction that from moment to moment he might be called upon to act as interpreter or peacemaker, or to explain away difficulties. He did not understand women, but only his wife, from whom he had taken various prejudices on the subject; neither did he understand girls, but only Frances, whom, indeed, he ought to have known better than to suppose, either that she was likely to squabble with her

sister, or call him in to mediate or explain. Frances was not at all likely to do either of these things; and he knew that, yet lived in a vague dread, and did not even sit comfortably on his chair, and tried to distract his mind with a novel—which was the condition in which he was found by Mr Durant. The clergyman's visit did him a little good, giving him at once a grievance and an object of ridicule. During the rest of the day he was so far distracted from his real difficulties as to fall from time to time into fits of secret laughter over the idea of having been in all unconsciousness a source of danger for Tasie. He had never been a gay Lothario, as he said; but to have run the risk of destroying Tasie's peace of mind was beyond his wildest imagination. He longed to confide it to somebody, but there was no one with whom he could share the fun. Constance perhaps might have understood; but Frances! He relapsed into gravity when he thought of Frances. It was not the kind of ludicrous suggestion which would amuse her.

Meanwhile the girls, who were such strangers

to each other, yet so closely bound by nature, were endeavouring to come to a knowledge of each other by means which were much more subtle than any explanation their father could have supplied; so that he might, if he had understood them better, have been entirely at his ease on this point. As a matter of fact, though Constance was the cleverer of the two, it was Frances who advanced most quickly in her investigations, for the excellent reason that it was Constance who talked, while Frances, for the most part having nothing at all interesting to say of herself, held her peace. Frances had been awakened at an unusually late hour in the morning—for the agitation of the night had abridged her sleep at the other end—by the sounds of mirth which accompanied the first dialogue between her new sister and Mariuccia. The Italian which Constance knew was limited, but it was of a finer quality than any with which Mariuccia was acquainted; yet still they came to some sort of understanding, and both repudiated the efforts of Frances to explain. And from that moment Constance had kept

the conversation in her hands. She did not chatter, nor was there any appearance of loquacity in her; but Frances had lived much alone, and had been taught not to disturb her father when she was with him, so that it was more her habit to be talked to than to talk. She did not even ask many questions—they were scarcely necessary; for Constance, as was natural, was full of herself and of her motives for the step she had taken. These revelations gave Frances new lights almost at every word.

“You always knew, then, about—us?” Frances said. She had intended to say “about me,” but refrained, with mingled modesty and pride.

“Oh, certainly. Mamma always writes, you know, at Christmas, if not oftener. We did not know you were here. It was Markham who found out that. Markham is the most active-minded fellow in the world. Papa does not much like him. I daresay you have never heard anything very favourable of him; but that is a mistake. We knew pretty well about you. Mamma used to ask that you should write, since there was no reason why, at your

age, you should not speak for yourself; but you never did. I suppose he thought it better not."

"I suppose so."

"I should not myself have been restrained by that," said Constance. "I think very well on the whole of papa; but obedience of that sort at our age is too much. I should not have obeyed him. I should have told him that in such a matter I must judge for myself. However, if one learns anything as one grows up," said this young philosopher, "it is that no two people are alike. I suppose that was not how the subject presented itself to you?"

Frances made no reply. She wondered what she would have said had she been told to write to an unknown mother. Ought she to do so now? The idea was a very strange one to her mind, and yet what could be more natural? It was with a sense of precipitate avoidance of a subject which must be contemplated fully at an after-period, that she said hurriedly, "I have never written letters. It did not come into my head."

“Ah!” said Constance, looking at her with a sort of impartial scrutiny. Then she added, with a sequence of thoughts which it was not difficult to follow, “Don’t you think it is very odd that you and I should be the same age?”

Frances felt herself grow red, and the water came to her eyes. She looked wistfully at the other, who was so much more advanced than she felt herself to be. “I suppose—we ought to have been like each other,” she said.

“We are not, however, a bit. You are like mamma. I don’t know whether you are like her in mind—but on the outside. And I am like *him*. It is very funny. It shows that one has these peculiarities from one’s birth; it couldn’t be habit or association, as people say, for I have never been with him—neither have you with mamma. I suppose he is very independent-minded, and does what he likes without thinking? So do I. And you consider what other people will say, and how it will look, and a thousand things.”

It did not seem to Frances that this was the case; but she was not at all in the habit of studying herself, and made no protest. Did

she consider very much what other people would say? Perhaps it was true. She had been obliged, she reflected, to consider what Mariuccia would say; so that probably Constance was right.

“It was Markham that discovered you, after all, as I told you. He is invaluable; he never forgets; and if you want to find anything out, he will take any amount of trouble. I may as well tell you why I left home. If we are going to live together as sisters, we ought to make confidants of each other; and if you have to go, you can take my part. Well, then! You must know there is a man in it. They say you should always ask, ‘Who is She?’ when there is a row between men; and I am sure it is just as natural to ask, ‘Who is He?’ when a girl gets into a scrape.”

The language, the tone, the meaning, were all new to Frances. She did not know anything about it. When there is a row between men; when a girl gets into a scrape: the one and the other were equally far from her experience. She felt herself blush, though she scarcely knew why. She shook her head when Constance

added, though rather as a remark than as a question, "Don't you know? Oh, well; I did not mean, have you any personal experience, but as a general principle? The man in this case was well enough. Papa said, when I told him, that it was quite right; that I had better have made up my mind without making a fuss; that he would have advised me so, if he had known. But I will never allow that this is a point upon which any one can judge for you. Mamma pressed me more than a mother has any right to do—to a person of my age."

"But, Constance, eighteen is not so very old."

"Eighteen is the age of reason," said the girl, somewhat imperiously; then she paused and added—"in most cases, when one has been much in the world, like me. Besides, it is like the middle ages when your mother thinks she can make you do what she pleases and marry as she likes. That must be one's own affair. I must say that I thought papa would take my part more strongly, for they have always been so much opposed. But after all, though he is not in harmony with her, still the parents' side is his side."

“Did you not like—the gentleman?” said Frances. Nothing could be more modest than this question, and yet it brought the blood to her face. She had never heard the ordinary *badinage* on this subject, or thought of love with anything but awe and reverence, as a mystery altogether beyond her and out of discussion. She did not look at her sister as she put the question. Constance lay back in the long wicker-work chair, well lined with cushions, which was her father’s favourite seat, with her hands clasped behind her head, in one of those attitudes of complete *abandon* which Frances had been trained to think impossible to a girl.

“Did I like—the gentleman? I did not think that question could ever again be put to me in an original way. I see now what is the good of a sister. Mamma and Markham and all my people had such a different way of looking at it. You must know that *that* is not the first question, whether you like the man. As for that, I liked him—well enough. There was nothing to—dislike in him.”

Frances turned her eyes to her sister’s face with something like reproach. “I may not

have used the right word. I have never spoken on such subjects before."

"I have always been told that men are dreadful prudes," said Constance. "I suppose papa has brought you up to think that such things must never be spoken of. I'll tell you what is original about it. I have been asked if he was not rich enough, if he was not handsome enough, if it was because he had no title: and I have been asked if I loved him, which was nonsense. I could answer all that; but you I can't answer. Don't I like him? I was not going to be persecuted about him. It was Markham who put this into my head. 'Why don't you go to your father,' he said, 'if you won't hear reason? He is just the sort of person to understand you, if we don't.' So, then, I took them at their word. I came off—to papa."

"Does Markham dislike papa? I mean, doesn't he think——"

"I know what you mean. They don't think that papa has good sense. They think him romantic, and all that. I have always been

accustomed to think so too. But the curious thing is that he isn't," said Constance, with an injured air. "I suppose, however foolish one's father may be for himself, he still feels that he must stand on the parents' side."

"You speak," said Frances, with a little indignation, "as if papa was likely to be against—his children; as if he were an enemy."

"Taking sides is not exactly being enemies," said Constance. "We are each of our own faction, you know. It is like Whigs and Tories. The fathers and mothers side with each other, even though they may be quite different and not get on together. There is a kind of reason in it. Only, I have always heard so much of papa as unreasonable and unlike other people, that I never thought of him in that light. He would be just the same, though, except that for the present I am a stranger, and he feels bound to be civil to me. If it were not for his politeness, he is capable of being medieval too."

"I don't know what medieval means," said Frances, with much heat, indignant to hear her father thus spoken of as a subject for criticism.

Perhaps she had criticised him in her time, as children use—but silently, not putting it into words, which makes a great difference. And besides, what one does one's self in this way is quite another matter. As she looked at this girl, who was a stranger, though in some extraordinary way not a stranger, a momentary pang and impotent sudden rage against the web of strange circumstances in which she felt herself caught and bewildered, flamed up in her mild eyes and mind, unaccustomed to complications. Constance took no notice of this sudden passion.

“It means bread and water,” she said, with a laugh, “and shutting up in one's own room, and cutting off of all communication from without. Mamma, if she were driven to it, is quite capable of that. They all are—rather than give in; but as we are not living in the middle ages, they have to give in at last. Perhaps, if I had thought that what you may call his official character would be too strong for papa, I should have fought it out at home. But I thought he at least would be himself, and not a conventional parent. I am sure he has been a very

queer sort of parent hitherto ; but the moment a fight comes, he puts himself on his own side."

She gave forth these opinions very calmly, lying back in the long chair, with her hands clasped behind her head, and her eyes following abstractedly the lines of the French coast. The voice which uttered sentiments so strange to Frances was of the most refined and harmonious tones, low, soft, and clear. And the lines of her slim elastic figure, and of her perfectly appropriate dress, which combined simplicity and costliness, carelessness and consummate care, as only high art can, added to the effect of a beauty which was not beauty in any demonstrative sense, but rather harmony, ease, grace, fine health, fine training, and what, for want of a better word, we call blood. Not that the bluest blood in the world inevitably carries with it this perfection of tone ; but Constance had the effect which a thoroughbred horse has upon the connoisseur. It would have detracted from the impression she made had there been any special point upon which the attention lingered—had her eyes, or her complexion, her

hands, or her hair, or any individual trait, called for particular notice. But hers was not beauty of that description.

Her sister, who was, so to speak, only a little rustic, sat and gazed at her in a kind of rapture. Her heart did not, as yet at least, go out towards this intruder into her life ; her affections were as yet untouched ; and her temper was a little excited, disturbed by the critical tone which her sister assumed, and the calm frankness with which she spoke. But though all these dissatisfied, almost hostile sentiments were in Frances' mind, her eyes and attention were fascinated. She could not resist the influence which this external perfection of being produced upon her. It was only perhaps now in the full morning light, in the *abandon* of this confidence and candour, which had none of the usual tenderness of confidential revelations, but rather a certain half-disdainful self-discovery which necessity demanded, that Frances fully perceived her sister's gifts. Her own impatience, her little impulses of irritation and contradiction, died away in the wondering

admiration with which she gazed. Constance showed no sign even of remarking the effect she produced. She said meditatively, dropping the words into the calm air without any apparent conception of novelty or wonder in them, "I wonder how you will like it when you have to go."

CHAPTER XI.

WITHIN the first few days, a great many of these conversations took place, and Frances gradually formed an idea to herself—not, perhaps, very like reality, but yet an idea—of the other life from which her sister had come. The chief figure in it was “mamma,” the mother with whom Constance was so carelessly familiar, and of whom she herself knew nothing at all. Frances did not learn from her sister’s revelations to love her mother. The effect was very different from that which, in such circumstances, might have been looked for. She came to look upon this unknown representative of “the parents’ side,” as Constance said, as upon a sort of natural opponent, one who understood but little and sympathised not at all with the younger, the other faction, the generation which was to succeed and replace her. Of this fact the other girl never concealed her easy con-

viction. The elders for the moment had the power in their hands, but by-and-by their day would be over. There was nothing unkind or cruel in this certainty; it was simply the course of nature: by-and-by their sway would be upset by the natural progress of events, and in the meantime it was modified by the other certainty, that if the young stood firm, the elders had no alternative but to give in. Altogether, it was evident the parents' side was not the winning side; but all the same it had the power of annoying the other to a very great extent, and exercised this power with a selfishness which was sometimes brutal. Mamma, it was evident, had not considered Constance at all. She had taken her about into society for her own ends, not for her daughter's pleasure: and, finally, she had formed a plan by which Constance was to be handed over to another proprietor without any consultation of her own wishes.

The heart of Frances sank as she slowly identified this maternal image, so different from that which fancy and nature suggest. She tried to compare it with the image which she herself might in her turn have communicated of her

father, had it been she who was the expositor. It frightened her to find, as she tried this experiment in her own mind, that the representation of papa would not have been much more satisfactory. She would have shown him as passing his time chiefly in his library, taking very little notice of her tastes and wishes, settling what was to be done, where to go, everything that was of any importance in their life, without at all taking into account what she wished. This she had always felt to be perfectly natural, and she had no feeling of a grievance in the matter; but supposing it to be necessary to tell the story to an ignorant person, what would that ignorant person's opinion be? It gave her a great shock to perceive that the impression produced would also be one of harsh authority, indifferent, taking no note of the inclinations of those who were subject to it. That was how Constance would understand papa. It was not the case, and yet it would look so to one who did not know. Perceiving this, Frances came to feel that it might be natural to represent the world as consisting of two factions, parents and children. There was a certain truth in it. If

there should happen to occur any question—which was impossible—between papa and herself, she felt sure that it would be very difficult for him to realise that she had a will of her own; and yet Frances was very conscious of having a will of her own.

In this way she learned a great many things vaguely through the talk of her sister. She learned that balls and other entertainments, such as, to her inexperienced fancy, had seemed nothing but pleasure, were not in reality intended, at least as their first object, for pleasure at all. Constance spoke of them as things to which one must go. “We looked in for an hour,” she would say. “Mamma thinks she ought to have half-a-dozen places to go to every evening,” with a tone in which there was more sense of injury than pleasure. Then there was the mysterious question of love, which was at once so simple and so awful a matter, on which there could be no doubt or question: that, it appeared, was quite a complicated affair, in which the lover, the hero, was transferred into “the man,” whose qualities had to be discovered and considered, as if he were a candidate for a pub-

lic office. All this bewildered Frances more than can be imagined or described. Her sister's arrival, and the disclosures involved in it, had broken up to her all the known lines of heaven and earth; and now that everything had settled down again, and these lines were beginning once more to be apparent, Frances felt that though they were wider, they were narrower too. She knew a great deal more; but knowledge only made that appear hard and unyielding which had been elastic and infinite. The vague and imaginary were a great deal more lovely than this, which, according to her sister's revelation, was the real and true.

Another very curious experience for Frances occurred when Mrs Durant and Mrs Gaunt, as in duty bound, and moved with lively curiosity, came to call and make acquaintance with Mr Waring's new daughter. Constance regarded these visitors with languid curiosity, only half rising from her chair to acknowledge her introduction to them, and leaving Frances to answer the questions which they thought it only civil to put. Did she like Bordighera?

"Oh yes; well enough," Constance replied.

"My sister thinks the people not so picturesque as she expected," said Frances.

"But of course she felt the delightful difference in the climate?" People, Mrs Durant understood, were suffering dreadfully from east wind in London.

"Ah! one doesn't notice in town," said Constance.

"My sister is not accustomed to living without comforts and with so little furniture. You know that makes a great difference," said her anxious expositor and apologist.

And then there would ensue a long pause, which the new-comer did nothing at all to break: and then the conversation fell into the ordinary discussion of who was at church on Sunday, how many new people from the hotels, and how disgraceful it was that some who were evidently English should either poke into the Roman Catholic places or never go to church at all.

"It comes to the same thing, indeed," Mrs Durant said, indignantly; "for when they go to the native place of worship, they don't understand. Even I, that have been so long on the Continent, I can't follow the service."

"But papa can," said Tasie.

"Ah, papa—papa is much more highly educated than I could ever pretend to be; and besides, he is a theologian, and knows. There were quite half-a-dozen people, evidently English, whom I saw with my own eyes coming out of the chapel on the Marina. Oh, don't say anything, Tasie! I think, in a foreign place, where the English have a character to keep up, it is quite a sin."

"You know, mamma, they think nobody knows them," Tasie said.

Mrs Gaunt did not care so much who attended church; but when she found that Constance had, as she told the General, "really nothing to say for herself," she too dropped into her habitual mode of talk. She did her best in the first place to elicit the opinions of Constance about Bordighera and the climate, about how she thought Mr Waring looking, and if dear Frances was not far stronger than she used to be. But when these judicious inquiries failed of a response, Mrs Gaunt almost turned her back upon Constance. "I have had a letter from Katie, my dear," she said.

“Have you indeed? I hope she is quite well—and the babies?”

“Oh, the babies; they are always well. But poor Katie, she has been a great sufferer. I told you she had a touch of fever, by last mail. Now it is her liver. You are never safe from your liver in India. She had been up to the hills, and there she met Douglas, who had gone to settle his wife and children. His wife is a poor little creature, always ailing; and their second boy—— But, dear me, I have not told you my great news! Frances—George is coming home! He is coming by Brindisi and Venice, and will be here directly. I told him I was sure all my kind neighbours would be so glad to see him; and it will be so nice for him—don’t you think?—to see Italy on his way.”

“Oh, very nice,” said Frances. “And you must be very happy, both the General and you.”

“The General does not say much, but he is just as happy as I am. Fancy! by next mail! in another week!” The poor lady dried her eyes, and added, laughing, sobbing, “Only think—in a week—my youngest boy!”

“Do you mean to say,” said Constance, when

Mrs Gaunt was gone, "that you have made them believe you care? Oh, that is exactly like mamma. She makes people think she is quite happy and quite miserable about their affairs, when she does not care one little bit! What is this woman's youngest son to you?"

"But she is—— I have been here all my life. I am glad that she should be happy," cried Frances, suddenly placed upon her defence.

When she thought of it, Mrs Gaunt's youngest boy was nothing at all to her; nor did she care very much whether all the English in the hotels on the Marina went to church. But Mrs Gaunt was interested in the one, and the Durants in the other. And was it true what Constance said, that she was a humbug, that she was a deceiver, because she pretended to care? Frances was much confused by this question. There was something in it: perhaps it was true. She faltered as she replied, "Do you think it is wrong to sympathise? It is true that I don't feel all that for myself. But still it is not false, for I do feel it for them—in a sort of a way."

"And that is all the society you have here? the clergywoman and the old soldier. And

will they expect me, too, to feel for them—in a sort of a way?”

“Dear Constance,” said Frances, in a pleading tone, “it could never be quite the same, you know; because you are a stranger, and I have known them ever since I was quite a little thing. They have all been very kind to me. They used to have me to tea; and Tasie would play with me; and Mrs Gaunt brought down all her Indian curiosities to amuse me. Oh, you don’t know how kind they are! I wonder, sometimes, when I see all the carved ivory things, and remember how they were taken out from under the glass shades for me, a little thing, how I didn’t break them, and how dear Mrs Gaunt could trust me with them! And then Tasie——”

“Tasie! What a ridiculous name! But it suits her well enough. She must be forty, I should think.”

“Her right name is Anastasia. She is called after the Countess of Denrara, who is her god-mother,” said Frances, with great gravity. She had heard this explanation a great many times from Mrs Durant, and unconsciously repeated it in something of the same tone. Constance

received this with a sudden laugh, and clapped her hands.

“I didn’t know you were a mimic. That is capital. Do Tasie now. I am sure you can; and then we shall have got a laugh out of them at least.”

“What do you mean?” asked Frances, growing pale. “Do you think I would laugh at them? When you know how really good they are——”

“Oh yes; I suppose I shall soon know,” said Constance, opening her mouth in a yawn, which Frances thought would have been dreadful in any one else, but which, somehow, was rather pretty in her. Everything was rather pretty in her, even her little rudenesses and impertinences. “If I stay here, of course I shall have to be intimate with them, as you have been. And must I take a tender interest in the youngest boy? Let us see! He will be a young soldier probably, as his mother is an old one, and as he is coming from India. He will never have seen any one. He is bound to take one of us for a goddess, either you or me.”

"Constance!" cried Frances, in her consternation raising her voice.

"Well," said her sister, "is there anything wonderful in that? We are very different types, and till we see the hero, we shall not be able to tell which he is likely to prefer. I see my way to a little diversion, if you will not be too puritanical, Fan. That never does a man any harm. It will rouse him up; it will give him something to think of. A place like this can't have much amusement, even for a youngest boy. We shall make him enjoy himself. His mother will bless us. You know, everybody says it is part of education for a man."

Frances looked at her sister with eyes bewildered, somewhat horrified, full of disapproval; while Constance, roused still more by her sister's horror than by the first mischievous suggestion which had awakened her from her indifference, laughed, and woke up into full animation. "We will go and return their visits," she said, "and I will be sympathetic too. But you shall see, when I take up a part, I make much more of it than you do. I know who these people

were who did not go to church. They were my people—the people I travelled with; and they shall go next Sunday, and Tasie's heart shall rejoice. When we call, I will let them know that England, even at Bordighera, expects every man—and every woman, which is more to the purpose—and that their absence was remarked. They will never be absent again, Fan. And as for the other interest, I shall inquire all about Katie's illnesses, and secure the very last intelligence about the youngest boy. She will show me his photograph. She will tell me stories of how he cut his first tooth. I wonder," said Constance, suddenly pausing and falling back into the old languid tone, "whether you will take up my old ways, when you are with mamma."

"I shall never have it in my power to try," said Frances. "Mamma will never want me." She was a little shy of using that name.

"Don't you know the condition, then? I think you don't half know our story. Papa behaved rather absurdly, but honestly too. When they separated, he settled that one of us should always be with her, and one of us

with him. He had the right to have taken us both. Men have more rights than women. We belong to him, but we don't belong to her. I don't see the reason of it, but still that is law. He allowed her to have one of us always. I daresay he thought two little things like what we were then would have been a bore to him. At all events, that is how it was settled. Now it does not need much cleverness to see, that as I have left her, she will probably claim you. She will not let papa off anything he has promised. She likes a girl in the house. She will say, 'Send me Frances.' I should like to hide behind a door or under a table, and see how you get on."

"I am sure you must be mistaken," said Frances, much disturbed; "there was never any question about me."

"No; because I was there. Oh yes; there was often question of you. Mamma has a little picture of you as you were when you were taken away. It always hangs in her room; and when I had to be scolded, she used to apostrophise you. She used to say, 'That little angel would never have done so-and-so.'

I did, for I was a little demon; so I rather hated you. She will send for you now; and I wonder if you will be a little angel still. I should like to see how you get on. But I shall be fully occupied here driving people to church, and making things pleasant for the old soldier's youngest son."

"I wish you would not talk so wildly," said Frances. "You are laughing at me all the time. You think I am such a simpleton, I will believe all you say. And indeed I am not clever enough to understand when you are laughing at me. All this is impossible. That I should take your place, and that you should take mine — oh, impossible!" cried Frances, with a sharper certainty than ever, as that last astounding idea made itself apparent: that Constance should order papa's dinners and see after the mayonnaise, and guide Mariuccia—"oh, impossible!" she cried.

"Nothing is impossible. You think I am not good enough to do the housekeeping for papa. I only hope you will *s'en tirer* of the difficulties of my place, as I shall of yours. Be a kind girl, and write to me, and tell me

how things go. I know what will happen. You will think everything charming at first; and then—— But don't let Markham get hold of you. Markham is very nice. He is capital for getting you out of a scrape; but still, I should not advise you to be guided by him, especially as you are papa's child, and he is not fond of papa."

"Please don't say any more," cried Frances. "I am not going—anywhere. I shall live as I have always done; but only more pleasantly from having—you."

"That is very pretty of you," said Constance, turning round to look at her; "if you are sure you mean it, and that it is not only true—in a sort of a way. I am afraid I have been nothing but a bore, breaking in upon you like this. It would be nice if we could be together," she added, very calmly, as if, however, no great amount of philosophy would be necessary to reconcile her to the absence of her sister. "It would be nice; but it will not be allowed. You needn't be afraid, though, for I can give you a number of hints which will make it much easier. Mamma is a little—she is just a little

—but I should think you would get on with her. You look so young, for one thing. She will begin your education over again, and she likes that; and then you are like her, which will give you a great pull. It is very funny to think of it; it is like a transformation scene; but I daresay we shall both get on a great deal better than you think. For my part, I never was the least afraid.”

With this, Constance sank into her chair again, and resumed the book she had been reading, with that perfect composure and indifference which filled Frances with admiration and dismay.

It was with difficulty that Frances herself kept her seat or her self-command at all. She had been drawing, making one of those innumerable sketches which could be made from the loggia: now of a peak among the mountains; now of the edge of foam on the blue, blue margin of the sea; now of an olive, now of a palm. Frances had a consistent conscientious way of besieging Nature, forcing her day by day to render up the secret of another tint, another shadow. It was thus she had come

to the insight which had made her father acknowledge that she was "growing up." But to-day her hand had no cunning. Her pulses beat so tumultuously that her pencil shared the agitation, and fluttered too. She kept still as long as she could, and spoiled a piece of paper, which to Frances, with very little money to lose, was something to be thought of. And when she had accomplished this, and added to her excitement the disagreeable and confusing effect of failure in what she was doing, Frances got up abruptly and took refuge in the household concerns, in directions about the dinner, and consultations with Mariuccia, who was beginning to be a little jealous of the signorina's absorption in her new companion. "If the young lady is indeed your sister, it is natural she should have a great deal of your attention; but not even for that does one desert one's old friends," Mariuccia said, with a little offended dignity.

Frances felt, with a sinking of the heart, that her sister's arrival had been to her perhaps less an unmixed pleasure than to any of the household. But she did not say so. She

made no exhibition of the trouble in her bosom, which even the consultations over the mayonnaise did not allay. That familiar duty indeed soothed her for the moment. The question was whether it should be made with chicken or fish—a very important matter. But though this did something to relieve her, the culinary effort did not last. To think of being sent away into that new world in which Constance had been brought up—to leave everything she knew—to meet “mamma,” whose name she whispered to herself almost trembling, feeling as if she took a liberty with a stranger,—all this was bewildering, wonderful, and made her heart beat and her head ache. It was not altogether that the anticipation was painful. There was a flutter of excitement in it which was almost delight; but it was an alarmed delight, which shook her nerves as much as if it had been unmixed terror. She could not compose herself into indifference as Constance did, or sit quietly down to think, or resume her usual occupation, in the face of this sudden opening out before her of the unforeseen and unknown.

CHAPTER XII.

THE days ran on for about a week with a suppressed and agitating expectation in them, which seemed to Frances to blur and muddle all the outlines, so that she could not recollect which was Wednesday or which was Friday, but felt it all one uncomfortable long feverish sort of day. She could not take the advantage of any pleasure there might be in them—and it was a pleasure to watch Constance, to hear her talk, to catch the many glimpses of so different a life, which came from the careless, easy monologue which was her style of conversation—for the exciting sense that she did not know what might happen at any moment, or what was going to become of her. Even the change from her familiar place at table, which Constance took without any thought, just as

she took her father's favourite chair on the loggia, and the difference in her room, helped to confuse her mind, and add to the feverish sensation of a life altogether out of joint.

Constance had not observed any of those signs of individual habitation about the room which Frances had fancied would lead to a discovery of the transfer she had made. She took it quite calmly, not perceiving anything beyond the ordinary in the chamber which Frances had adorned with her sketches, with the little curiosities she had picked up, with all the little collections of her short life. It was wanting still in many things which to Constance seemed simple necessities. How was she to know how many were in it which were luxuries to that primitive locality? She remained altogether unconscious, accordingly, of the sacrifice her sister had made for her, and spoke lightly of poor Frances' pet decorations, and of the sketches, the authorship of which she did not take the trouble to suspect. "What funny little pictures!" she had said. "Where did you get so many odd little

things? They look as if the frames were home-made, as well as the drawings."

Fortunately she was not in the habit of waiting for an answer to such a question, and she did not remark the colour that rose to her sister's cheeks. But all this added to the disturbing influence, and made these long days look unlike any other days in Frances' life. She took the other side of the table meekly with a half-smile at her father, warning him not to say anything; and she lived in the blue room without thinking of adding to its comforts—for what was the use, so long as this possible banishment hung over her head? Life seemed to be arrested during these half-dozen days. They had the mingled colours and huddled outlines of a spoiled drawing; they were not like anything else in her life, neither the established calm and certainty that went before, nor the strange novelty that followed after.

There were no confidences between her father and herself during this period. Since their conversation on the night of Constance's arrival, not a word had been said between them on the

subject. They mutually avoided all occasion for further talk. At least Mr Waring avoided it, not knowing how to meet his child, or to explain to her the hazard to which her life was exposed. He did not take into consideration the attraction of the novelty, the charm of the unknown mother and the unknown life, at which Frances permitted herself to take tremulous and stealthy glimpses as the days went on. He contemplated her fate from his own point of view as something like that of the princess who was doomed to the dragon's maw but for the never-to-be-forgotten interposition of St George, that emblem of chivalry. There was no St George visible on the horizon, and Waring thought the dragon no bad emblem of his wife. And he was ashamed to think that he was helpless to deliver her; and that, by his fault, this poor little Una, this hapless Andromeda, was to be delivered over to the waiting monster.

He avoided Frances, because he did not know how to break to her this possibility, or how, since Constance probably had made her aware of it, to console her in the terrible crisis

at which she had arrived. It was a painful crisis for himself as well as for her. The first evening on which, coming into the loggia to smoke his cigarette after dinner, he had found Constance extended in his favourite chair, had brought this fully home to him. He strolled out upon the open-air room with all the ease of custom, and for the first moment he did not quite understand what it was that was changed in it, that put him out, and made him feel as if he had come, not into his own familiar domestic centre, but somebody else's place. He hung about for a minute or two, confused, before he saw what it was; and then, with a half-laugh in his throat, and a mingled sense that he was annoyed, and that it was ridiculous to be annoyed, strolled across the loggia, and half seated himself on the outer wall, leaning against a pillar. He was astonished to think how much disconcerted he was, and with what a comical sense of injury he saw his daughter lying back so entirely at her ease in his chair. She was his daughter, but she was a stranger, and it was impossible to tell her that her place was not there. Next evening

he was almost angry, for he thought that Frances might have told her though he could not. And indeed Frances had done what she could to warn her sister of the usurpation. But Constance had no idea of vested rights of this description, and had paid no attention. She took very little notice, indeed, of what was said to her, unless it arrested her attention in some special way; and she had never been trained to understand that the master of a house has sacred privileges. She had not so much as known what it is to have a master to a house.

This and other trifles of the same kind gave to Waring something of the same confused and feverish feeling which was in the mind of Frances. And there hung over him a cloud as of something further to come, which was not so clear as her anticipations, yet was full of discomfort and apprehension. He thought of many things, not of one thing, as she did. It seemed to him not impossible that his wife herself might arrive some day as suddenly as Constance had done, to reclaim her child, or to take away his, for that was how they were

distinguished in his mind. The idea of seeing again the woman from whom he had been separated so long, filled him with dread; and that she should come here and see the limited and recluse life he led, and his bare rooms, and his homely servants, filled him with a kind of horror. Rather anything than that. He did not like to contemplate even the idea that it might be necessary to give up the girl, who had flattered him by taking refuge with him and seeking his protection; but neither was the thought of being left with her and having Frances taken from him endurable. In short, his mind was in a state of mortal confusion and tumult. He was like the commander of a besieged city, not knowing on what day he might be summoned to surrender; not able to come to any conclusion whether it would be most wise to yield, or if the state of his resources afforded any feasible hopes of holding out.

Constance had been a week at the Palazzo before the trumpets sounded: The letters were delivered just before the twelve-o'clock breakfast; and Frances had received so much warning

as this, that Mariuccia informed her there had been a large delivery that morning. The signor padrone had a great packet; and there were also some letters for the other young lady, Signorina Constanza. "But never any for thee, *carina*," Mariuccia had said. The poor girl thus addressed had a momentary sense that she was indeed to be pitied on this account, before the excitement of the certainty that now something definite must be known as to what was to become of her, swelled her veins to bursting; and she felt herself grow giddy with the thought that what had been so vague and visionary, might now be coming near, and that in an hour or less she would know! Waring was as usual shut up in his bookroom; but she could see Constance on the loggia with her lap full of letters, lying back in the long chair as usual, reading them as if they were the most ordinary things in the world. Frances, for her part, had to wait in silence until she should learn from others what her fate was to be. It seemed very strange that one girl should be free to do so much, while another of the same age could do nothing at all.

Waring came into breakfast with the letters in his hand. "I have heard from your mother," he said, looking straight before him, without turning to the right or the left. Frances tried to appropriate this to herself, to make some reply, but her voice died in her throat; and Constance, with the easiest certainty that it was she who was addressed, answered before she could recover herself.

"Yes—so have I. Mamma is rather fond of writing letters. She says she has told you what she wishes, and then she tells me to tell you. I don't suppose that is of much use?"

"Of no use at all," said he. "She is pretty explicit. She says——"

Constance leant over the table a little, holding up her finger. "Don't you think, papa," she said, "as it is business, that it would be better not to enter upon it just now? Wait till we have had our breakfast."

He looked at her with an air of surprise. "I don't see——" he said; then, after a moment's reflection, "Perhaps you are right, after all. It may be better not to say anything just now."

Frances had recovered her voice. She looked from one to another as they spoke, with a cruel consciousness that it was she, not they, who was most concerned. At this point she burst forth with feelings not to be controlled. "If it is on my account, I would rather know at once what it is," she cried.

And then she had to bear the looks of both—her father's astonished half-remorseful gaze, and the eyes of Constance, which conveyed a warning. Why should Constance, who had told her of the danger, warn her now not to betray her knowledge of it? Frances had got beyond her own control. She was vexed by the looks which were fixed upon her, and by the supposed consideration for her comfort which lay in their delay. "I know," she said quickly, "that it is something about me. If you think I care for breakfast, you are mistaken; but I think I have a right to know what it is, if it is about me. O papa, I don't mean to be—disagreeable," she cried suddenly, sinking into her own natural tone as she caught his eye.

"That is not very much like you, certainly," he said, in a confused voice.

“Evil communications,” said Constance, with a laugh. “I have done her harm already.”

Frances felt that her sister’s voice threw a new irritation into her mood. “I am not like myself,” she said, “because I know something is going to happen to me, and I don’t know what it is. Papa, I don’t want to be selfish, but let me know, please, only let me know what it is.”

“It is only that mamma has sent for you,” said Constance, lightly; “that is all. It is nothing so very dreadful. Now do let us have our breakfast in peace.”

“Is that true, papa?” Frances said.

“My dear little girl—I had meant to explain it all—to tell you—and I have been so silly as to put off. Your sister does not understand how we have lived together, Frances, you and I.”

“Am I to go, papa?”

He made a gesture of despair. “I don’t know what to do. I have given my promise. It is as bad for me as for you, Frances. But what am I to do?”

“I suppose,” said Constance, who had helped herself very tranquilly from the dish which

Domenico had been holding unobserved at his master's elbow, "that there is no law that could make you part with her, if you don't wish to. Promises are all very well with strangers; but they are never kept—are they?—between husband and wife. The father has all the right on his side, and you are not obliged to give either of us up. What a blessing," she cried suddenly, "to have servants who don't understand! That was why I said, don't talk of it till after breakfast. But it does not at all matter. It is as good as if he were deaf and dumb. Papa, you need not give her up unless you like."

Waring looked at his daughter with mingled attention and anger. The suggestion was detestable, but yet——

"And then," she went on, "there is another thing. It might have been all very well when we were children; but now we are of an age to judge for ourselves. At eighteen, you can choose which you will stay with. Oh, younger than that. There have been several trials in the papers—no one can force Frances to go anywhere she does not like, at her age."

"I wish," he said, with a little irritation,

restrained by politeness, for Constance was still a young-lady visitor to her father, "that you would leave this question to be discussed afterwards. Your sister was right, Frances—after breakfast—after I have had a little time to think of it. I cannot come to any decision all at once."

"That is a great deal better," said Constance, approvingly. "One can't tell all in a moment. Frances is like mamma in that too. She requires you to know your own mind—to say Yes or No at once. You and I are very like each other, papa. I shall never hurry your decision, or ask you to settle a thing in a moment. But these cutlets are getting quite cold. Do have some before they are spoiled."

Waring had no mind for the cutlets, to which he helped himself mechanically. He did not like to look at Frances, who sat silent, with her hands clasped on the table, pale but with a light in her eyes. The voice of Constance running on, forming a kind of veil for the trouble and confusion in his own mind, and doubtless in that of her sister, was half a relief and half an aggravation; he was grateful for it,

yet irritated by it. He felt himself to play a very poor figure in the transaction altogether, as he had felt ever since she arrived. Frances, whom he had regarded as a child, had sprung up into a judge, into all the dignity of an injured person, whose right to complain of the usage to which she had been subjected no one could deny. And when he stole a furtive glance at her pale face, her head held high, the new light that burned in her eyes, he felt that she was fully aware of the wrong he had done her, and that it would not be so easy to dictate what she was to do, as everybody up to this moment had supposed. He saw, or thought he saw, resistance, indignation, in the gleam that had been awakened in Frances' dove's eyes. And his heart fell—yet rose also; for how could he constrain her, if she refused to go? He had no right to constrain her. Her mother might complain, but it would not be his doing. On the other side, it would be shameful, pitiful on his part to go back from his word—to acknowledge to his wife that he could not do what he had pledged himself to do.

In every way it was an uncomfortable break-

fast, all the forms of which he followed, partly for the sake of Constance, partly for that of Domenico. But Frances ate nothing, he could see. He prolonged the meal, through a sort of fear of the interview afterwards, of what he must say to her, and of what she should reply. He felt ashamed of his reluctance to encounter this young creature, whom a few days ago he had smiled at as a child; and ashamed to look her in the face, to explain and argue with, and entreat, where he had been always used to tell her to do this and that, without the faintest fear that she would disobey him. If even he had been left to tell her himself of all the circumstances, to make her aware gradually of all that he had kept from her (for her good), to show her now how his word was pledged! But even this had been taken out of his hands.

All this time no one talked but Constance, who went on with an occasional remark and with her meal, for which she had a good appetite. "I wish you would eat something, Frances," she said. "You need not begin to punish yourself at once. I feel it dreadfully, for it is all my fault. It is I who ought to lose

my breakfast, not you. If you will take a few hints from me, I don't think you will find it so bad. Or perhaps, if we all lay our heads together, we may see some way out of it. Papa knows the law, and I know the English side, and you know what you think yourself. Let us talk it all over, and perhaps we may see our way."

To this Frances made no reply save a little inclination of her head, and sat with her eyes shining, with a certain proud air of self-control and self-support, which was something quite new to her. When the uncomfortable repast could be prolonged no longer, she was the first to get up. "If you do not mind," she said, "I want to speak to papa by himself."

Constance had risen too. She looked with an air of surprise at her little sister. "Oh, if you like," she said; "but I think you will find that I can be of use."

"If you are going to the bookroom, I will come with you, papa," said Frances, but she did not wait for any reply; she opened the door and walked before him into that place of refuge, where he had been sheltering himself all

these days. Constance gave him an inquiring look, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

“She is on her high horse, and she is more like mamma than ever; but I suppose I may come all the same.”

He wavered a moment: he would have been glad of her interposition, even though it irritated him; but he had a whimsical sense of alarm in his mind, which he could not get over. He was afraid of Frances—which was one of the most comical things in the world. He shook his head, and followed humbly into the bookroom, and himself closed the door upon the intruder. Frances had seated herself already at his table, in the seat which she always occupied when she came to consult him about the dinner, or about something out of the usual round which Mariuccia had asked for. To see her seated there, and to feel that the door was closed against all intrusion, made Waring feel as if all this disturbance was a dream. How good the quiet had been; the calm days, which nothing interfered with; the little housekeeper, whose child-like prudence and wisdom were so quaint, whose simple obedience was so ready, who never, save

in respect to the *spese*, set up her own will or way ! His heart grew very soft as he sat down and looked at her. No, he said to himself, he would not break that old bond ; he would not compel his little girl to leave him, send her out as a sacrifice. He would rather stand against all the wives in the world.

“ Papa,” said Frances, “ a great deal of harm has been done by keeping me ignorant. I want you to show me mamma’s letter. Unless I see it, how can I know ? ”

This pulled him up abruptly and checked the softening mood. “ Your mother’s letter,” he said, “ goes over a great deal of old ground. I don’t see that it could do you any good. It appears I promised—what Constance told you, with her usual coolness—that one of you should be always left with her. Perhaps that was foolish.”

“ Surely, papa, it was just.”

“ Well, I thought so at the time. I wanted to do what was right. But there was no right in the matter. I had a perfect right to take you both away, to bring you up as I pleased. It would have been better, perhaps, had I done what the law authorised me to do. However,

that need not be gone into now. What your sister said was quite true. You are at an age when you are supposed to be able to judge for yourself, and nobody in the world can force you to go where you don't want to go."

"But if you promised, and if—my mother trusted to your promise?" There was something more solemn in that title than to say "mamma." It seemed easier to apply it to the unknown.

"I won't have you made a sacrifice of on my account," he said, hastily.

He was surprised by her composure, by that unwonted light in her eyes. She answered him with great gravity, slowly, as if conscious of the importance of her conclusion. "It would be no sacrifice," she said.

Waring, there could be no doubt, was very much startled. He could not believe his ears. "No sacrifice? Do you mean to say that you want to leave me?" he cried.

"No, papa: that is, I did not. I knew nothing. But now that I know, if my mother wants me, I will go to her. It is my duty. And I should like it," she added, after a pause.

Waring was dumb with surprise and dismay. He stared at her, scarcely able to believe that she could understand what she was saying—he, who had been afraid to suggest anything of the kind, who had thought of Andromeda and the virgins who were sacrificed to the dragon. He gazed aghast at this new aspect of the face with which he was so familiar, the uplifted head and shining eyes. He could not believe that this was Frances, his always docile, submissive, unemancipated girl.

“Papa,” she said, “everything seems changed, and I too. I want to know my mother; I want to see—how other people live.”

“Other people!” He was glad of an outlet for his irritation. “What have we to do with other people? If it had not been for this unlucky arrival, you would never have known.”

“I must have known some time,” she said. “And do you think it right that a girl should not know her mother—when she has a mother? I want to go to her, papa.”

He flung out of his chair with an angry movement, and took up the keys which lay on his table and opened a small cabinet which stood

in the corner of the room, Frances watching him all the time with the greatest attention. Out of this he brought a small packet of letters, and threw them to her with a movement which, for so gentle a man, was almost violent. "I kept these back for your good, not to disturb your mind. You may as well have them, since they belong to you—now," he said.

CHAPTER XIII.

“COME out for a walk, papa,” said Constance.

“What! in the heat of the day? You think you are in England.”

“No, indeed. I wish I did—at least, that is not what I mean. But I wish you did not think it necessary to stay in a place like this. Why should you shut yourself out from the world? You are very clever, papa.”

“Who told you so? You cannot have found that out by your own unassisted judgment.”

“A great many people have told me. I have always known. You seem to have made a mystery about us, but we never made any mystery about you: for one thing, of course we couldn’t, for everybody knew. But if you chose to go back to England——”

“I shall never go back to England.”

“Oh,” said Constance, with a laugh, “never is a long day.”

“So long a day, that it is a pity you should link your fortunes to mine, my dear. Frances has been brought up to it; but your case is quite different: and you see even she catches at the first opportunity of getting away.”

“You are scarcely just to Frances,” said Constance, with her usual calm. “You might have said the same thing of me. I took the first opportunity also. To know that one has a father, whom one never remembers to have seen, is very exciting to the imagination; and just in so much as one has been disappointed in the parent one knows, one expects to find perfection in the parent one has never seen. Anything that you don’t know is better than everything you do know,” she added, with the air of a philosopher.

“I am afraid, in that case, acquaintance has been fatal to your ideal.”

“Not exactly,” she said. “Of course you are quite different from what I supposed. But I think we might get on well enough, if you please. Do come out. If we keep in the shade,

it is not really very hot. It is often hotter in London, where nobody thinks of staying indoors. If we are to live together, don't you think you must begin by giving in to me a little, papa?"

"Not to the extent of getting a sunstroke."

"In March!" she cried, with a tone of mild derision. "Let me come into the bookroom, then. You think if Frances goes that you will never be able to get on with me."

"My thoughts have not gone so far as that. I may have believed that a young lady fresh from all the gaieties of London——"

"But so tired of them, and very glad of a little novelty, however it presents itself."

"Yes, so long as it continues novel. But the novelty of making the *spese* in a village, and looking sharply after every centesimo that is asked for an artichoke——"

"The *spese* means the daily expenses? I should not mind that. And Mariuccia is far more entertaining than an ordinary English cook. And the neighbours—well, the neighbours afford some opportunities for fun. Mrs Gaunt—is it?—expects her youngest boy. And then there is Tasie."

The name of Tasie brought a certain relaxation to the muscles of Waring's face. He gave a glance round him, to see that all the doors were closed. "I must confide in you, Constance; though, mind, Frances must not share it. I sitting here, simple as you see me, have been supposed dangerous to Tasie's peace of mind. Is not that an excellent joke?"

"I don't see that it is a joke at all," said Constance, without even a smile. "Why, Tasie is antediluvian. She must be nearly as old as you are. Any old gentleman might be dangerous to Tasie. Tell me something more wonderful than that."

"Oh, that is how it appears to you!" said Waring. His laugh came to a sudden end, broken off, so to speak, in half, and an air of portentous gravity came over his face. He turned over the papers on the table before him, as with a sudden thought. "By the way, I forgot I had something to do this afternoon," he said. "Before dinner, perhaps, we may take a stroll, if the sun is not so hot. But this is my working-time," he added, with a stiff smile.

Constance could not disregard so plain a hint.

She rose up quickly. She had taken Frances' chair, which he had forgiven her at first ; but it made another note against her now.

“What have I done?” she said to herself, raising her eyebrows, angry and yet half amused by her dismissal. Frances had gone to her room too, and was not to be disturbed, as her sister had seen by the look of her face. She felt herself, as she would have said, very much “out of it,” as she wandered round the deserted *salone*, looking at everything in it with a care suggested by her solitude rather than any real interest. She looked at the big high-coloured water-pots, turned into decorations, one could imagine against their will, which stood in the corners of the room, and which were Mrs Durant's present to Frances ; and at the blue Savona vases, with the names of medicines, real or imaginary, betraying their original intention ; and all the other decorative scraps—the little old pictures, the pieces of needlework and brocade. They were pretty when she looked at them, though she had not perceived their beauty at the first glance. There were more decorations of the same de-

scription in the ante-room, which gave her a little additional occupation ; and then she strolled into the loggia and threw herself into the long chair. She had a book, one of the novels she had bought on the journey. But Constance was not accustomed to much reading. She got through a chapter or two ; and then she looked round upon the view and mused a little, and then returned to her novel. The second time she threw it down and went back to the drawing-room, and had another look at the Savona pots. She had thought how well they would look on a certain shelf at "home." And then she stopped and took herself to task. What did she mean by home ? This was home. She was going to live here ; it was to be her place in the world. What she had to do was to think of the decorations here, and whether she could add to them, not of vacant corners in another place. Finally, she returned again to the loggia, and sat down once more rather drearily.

There had never occurred a day in her experience in which she had been so long without "something to do." Something to do meant

something that was amusing, something to pass the time, somebody to entertain, or perhaps, if nothing else was possible, to quarrel with. To sit alone and look round her at "the view," to have not a creature to say a word to, and nothing to engage herself with but a book—and nothing to look forward to but this same thing repeated three hundred and sixty-five days in the year! The prospect, the thought, made Constance shiver. It could not be. She must do something to break the spell. But what was there to do? The *spese* were all made for to-day, the dinner was ordered; and she knew very little either about the *spese* or the dinner. She would have to learn, to think of new dishes, and write them down in a little book, as Frances did. Her dinners, she said to herself, must be better than those of Frances. But when was she to begin, and how was she to do it? In the meantime she went and fetched a shawl, and while the sun blazed straight on the loggia from the south, to which it was open in front, and left only one scrap of shade in a corner scarcely enough to shelter the long chair, fell asleep there, finding that she had nothing else to do.

Frances had gone to her room with her packet of letters. She had not thought what they were, nor what had been the meaning of what her father said when he gave them to her. She took them—no, not to her own room, but to the blue room, in which there was so little comfort. Her little easy-chair, her writing-table, all the things with which she was at home, belonged to Constance now. She sat down, or rather up, in a stiff upright chair, and opened her little packet upon her bed. To her astonishment, she found that it contained letters addressed to herself, unopened. The first of them was printed in large letters, as for the eyes of a child. They were very simple, not very long, concluding invariably with one phrase: “Dear, write to me” —“Write to me, my darling.” Frances read them with her eyes full of tears, with a rising wave of passion and resentment which seemed to suffocate her. He had kept them all back. What harm could they have done? Why should she have been kept in ignorance, and made to appear like a heartless child, like a creature without sense or feeling? Half for her mother,

half for herself, the girl's heart swelled with a kind of fury. She had not been ready to judge her father even after she had been aware of his sin against her. She had still accepted what he did as part of him, bidding her own mind be silent, hushing all criticism. But when she read these little letters, her passion overflowed. How dared he to ignore all her rights, to allow herself to be misrepresented, to give a false idea of her? This was the most poignant pang of all. Without being selfish, it is still impossible to feel a wrong of this kind to another so acutely as to yourself. He had deprived her of the comfort of knowing that she had a mother, of communicating with her, of retaining some hold upon that closest of natural friends. That injury she had condoned and forgiven; but when Frances saw how her father's action must have shaped the idea of herself in the mind of her mother, there was a moment in which she felt that she could not forgive him. If she had received year by year these tender letters, yet never had been moved to answer one of them, what a creature must she have been, devoid of heart or common feeling, or even good taste,

that superficial grace by which the want of better things is concealed! She was more horrified by this thought than by any other discovery she could have made. She seemed to see the Frances whom her mother knew—a little ill-conditioned child; a small, petty, ungracious, unloving girl. Was this what had been thought of her? And it was all his fault—all her father's fault!

At first she could see no excuse for him. She would not allow to herself that any love for her, or desire to retain her affection, was at the bottom of the concealment. She got a sheet of paper, and began to write with passionate vehemence, pouring forth all her heart. "Imagine that I have never seen your dear letters till to-day—never till to-day! and what must you think of me?" she wrote. But when she had put her whole heart into it, working a miracle, and making the dull paper to glow and weep, there came a change over her thoughts. She had kept his secret till now. She had not betrayed even to Constance the ignorance in which she had been kept; and should she change her course, and betray him now?

As she came to think it over, she felt that she herself blamed her father bitterly, that he had fallen from the pedestal on which to her he had stood all her life. Yet the thought that others should be conscious of this degradation was terrible to her. When Constance spoke lightly of him, it was intolerable to Frances; and the mother of whom she knew nothing, of whom she knew only that she was her mother, a woman who had grievances of her own against him, who would be perhaps pleased, almost pleased, to have proof that he had done this wrong! Frances paused, with the fervour of indignation still in her heart, to consider how she should bear it if this were so. It was all selfish, she said to herself, growing more miserable as she fought with the conviction that whether in condemning him or covering what he had done, herself was her first thought. She had to choose now between vindicating herself at his cost, or suffering continued misconception to screen him. Which should she do? Slowly she folded up the letter she had written and put it away, not destroying but saving it, as leaving it still possible to carry

out her first intention. Then she wrote another shorter, half-fictitious letter, in which the bitterness in her heart seemed to take the form of reproach, and her consent to obey her mother's call was forced and sullen. But this letter was no sooner written than it was torn to pieces. What was she to do? She ended, after much thought, by destroying also her first letter, and writing as follows:—

“DEAR MOTHER,—To see my sister and to hear that you want me, is very bewildering and astonishing to me. I am very ready to come, if, indeed, you will forgive me all that you must think so bad in me, and let me try as well as I can to please you. Indeed I desire to do so with all my heart. I have understood very little, and I have been thoughtless, and, you will think, without any natural affection; but this is because I was so ignorant, and had nobody to tell me. Forgive me, dear mamma. I do not feel as if I dare write to you now and call you by that name. As soon as we can consider and see how it is best for me to travel, I will come. I am not clever

and beautiful, like Constance; but indeed I do wish to please you with all my heart.

“FRANCES.”

This was all she could say. She put it up in an envelope, feeling confused with her long thinking, and with all the elements of change that were about her, and took it back to the bookroom to ask for the address. She had felt that she could not approach her father with composure or speak to him of ordinary matters; but it made a little formal bridge, as it were, from one kind of intercourse to another, to ask him for that address.

“Will you please tell me where mamma lives?” she said.

Waring turned round quickly to look at her. “So you have written already?”

“O papa, can you say ‘already’? What kind of creature must she think I am, never to have sent a word all these years?”

He paused a moment and then said, “You have told her, I suppose?”

“I have told her nothing except that I am ready to come whenever we can arrange how

I am to travel. Papa," she said, with one of those sudden relentings which come in the way of our sternest displeasure with those we love—"O papa," laying her hand on his arm, "why did you do it? I am obliged to let her think that I have been without a heart all my life—for I cannot bear it when any one blames you."

"Frances," he said, with a response equally sudden, putting his arm round her, "what will my life be without you? I have always trusted in you, depended on you without knowing it. Let Constance go back to her, and stay you with me."

Frances had not been accustomed to many demonstrations of affection, and this moved her almost beyond her power of self-control. She put down her head upon her father's shoulder and cried, "Oh, if we could only go back a week! but we can't; no, nor even half a day. Things that might have been this morning, can't be now, papa! I was very, very angry—oh, in a rage—when I read these letters. Why did you keep them from me? Why did you keep my mother from me? I wrote and told her everything, and then I tore up

my letter and told her nothing. But I can never be the same again," said the girl, shaking her head with that conviction of the unchangeableness of a first trouble which is so strong in youth. "Now I know what it is to be one thing and appear another, and to bear blame and suffer for what you have not deserved."

Waring repented his appeal to his child. He repented even the sudden impulse which had induced him to make it. He withdrew his arm from her with a sudden revulsion of feeling, and a recollection that Constance was not emotional, but a young woman of the world, who would understand many things which Frances did not understand. He withdrew his arm, and said somewhat coldly, "Show me what address you have put upon your mother's letter. You must not make any mistake in that."

Frances dried her eyes hastily, and felt the check. She put her letter before him without a word. It was addressed to Mrs Waring, no more.

"I thought so," he said, with a laugh which

sounded harsh to the excited girl; "and, to be sure, you had no means of knowing. I told you your mother was a much more important person than I. You will see the difference between wealth and poverty, as well as between a father's sway and a mother's, when you go to Eaton Square. This is your mother's address." He wrote it hastily on a piece of paper and pushed it towards her. Frances had received many shocks and surprises in the course of these days, but scarcely one which was more startling to her simple mind than this. The paper which her father gave her did not bear his name. It was addressed to Lady Markham, Eaton Square, London. Frances turned to him an astonished gaze. "That is where—mamma is living?" she said.

"That is—your mother's name and address," he answered, coldly. "I told you she was a greater personage than I."

"But, papa——"

"You are not aware," he said, "that, according to the beautiful arrangements of society, a woman who makes a second marriage below

her is allowed to keep her first husband's name. It is so, however. Lady Markham chose to avail herself of that privilege. That is all, I suppose? You can send your letter without any further reference to me."

Frances went away without a word, treading softly, with a sort of suspense of life and thought. She could not tell how she felt or what it meant. She knew nothing about the arrangements of society. Did it mean something wrong, something that was impossible? Frances could not tell how that could be—that your father and mother should not only live apart, but have different names. A vague horror took possession of her mind. She went back to her room again, and stared at that strange piece of paper without knowing what to make of it. Lady Markham! It was not to that personage she had written her poor little simple letter. How could she say mother to a great lady, one who was not even of the same name? She was far too ignorant to know how little importance was to be attached to this. To Frances, a name was so much. She

had never been taught anything but the primitive symbols, the innocently conventional alphabet of life. This new discovery filled her with a chill horror. She took her letter out of its envelope with the intention of destroying that too, and letting silence—that silence which had reigned over her life so long—fall again and for ever between her and the mother whose very name was not hers. But as this impulse swept over her, her eye caught one of the first of the little letters which had revealed this unknown woman to her. It was written in very large letters, such as a child might read, and in little words. “My darling, write to me; I long so for you.—Your loving Mother.” Her simple mind was swept by contending impulses, like strong winds carrying her now one way, now another. And unless it should be that unknown mother herself, there was nobody in the world to whom she could turn for counsel. Her heart revolted against Constance, and her father had been vexed, she could not tell how. She was incapable of betraying the secrets of the family

to any one beyond its range. What was she to do?"

And all this because the mother, the source of so much disturbance in her little life, was Lady Markham and not Mrs Waring! But this, to the ignorance and simplicity of Frances, was the most incomprehensible mystery of all.

CHAPTER XIV.

WARING went out with Constance when the sun got low in the skies. He took a much longer walk than was at all usual to him, and pointed out to her many points of view. The paths that ran among the olive woods, the little terraces which cut up the sides of the hills, the cool grey foliage and gnarled trunks, the clumps of flowers—garden flowers in England, but here as wild, and rather more common than blades of grass—delighted her; and her talk delighted him. He had not gone so far for months; nor had he, he thought, for years found the time go so fast. It was very different from Frances' mild attempts at conversation. "Do you think, papa?" "Do you remember, papa?"—so many references to events so trifling, and her little talk about Tasie's

plans and Mrs Gaunt's news. Constance took him boldly into her life and told him what was going on in *the world*. Ah, the world! That was the only world. He had said in his bitterness, again and again, that Society was as limited as any village, and duchesses curiously like washerwomen; but when he found himself once more on the edge of that great tumult of existence, he was like the old war-horse that neighs at the sound of the battle. He began to ask her questions about the people he had known. He had always been a shy, proud man, and had never thrown himself into the stream; but still there had been people who had known him and liked him, or whom he had liked: and gradually he awakened into animation and pleasure.

When they met the old General taking his 'stroll too, before dinner, that leathern old Indian was dazzled by the bright creature, who walked along between them, almost as tall as the two men, with her graceful careless step and independent ways, not deferring to them as the other ladies did, but leading the conversation. Even General Gaunt began

to think whether there was any one whom he could speak of, any one he had known, whom perhaps this young exponent of Society might know. She knew everybody. Even princes and princesses had no mystery for her. She told them what everybody said, with an air of knowing better, which in her meant no conceit or presumption, as in other young persons. Constance was quite unconscious of the possibility of being thus judged. She was not self-conscious at all. She was pleased to bring out her news for the advantage of the seniors. Frances was none the wiser when her sister told her the change that had come over the Grandmaisons, or how Lord Sunbury's marriage had been brought about, and why people now had altered their hours for the Row. Frances listened; but she had never heard about Lord Sunbury's marriage, nor why it should shock the elegant public. But the gentleman remembered his father, or they knew how young men commit themselves without intending it. It is not to be supposed that there was anything at all *risqué* in Constance's

talk. She touched, indeed, upon the edge of scandals which had been in the newspapers, and therefore were known even to people in the Riviera; but she did it with the most absolute innocence, either not knowing or not understanding the evil. "I believe there was something wrong, but I don't know what—mamma would never tell me," she said. Her conversation was like a very light graceful edition of a Society paper—not then begun to be—with all the nastiness and almost all the malice left out. But not quite all; there was enough to be piquant. "I am afraid I am a little ill-natured; but I don't like that man," she would say now and then. When she said, "I don't like that woman," the gentlemen laughed. She was conscious of having a little success, and she was pleased too. Frances perhaps might be a better housekeeper, but Constance could not but think that in the equally important work of amusing papa she would be more successful than Frances. It was not much of a triumph, perhaps, for a girl who had known so many; but yet it was the only one as

yet possible in the position in which she now was.

"I suppose it is settled that Frances is to go?" she said, as General Gaunt took the way to his bungalow, and she and her father turned towards home.

"She seems to have settled it for herself," he said.

"I am always repeating she is so like mamma—that is exactly what mamma would have done. They are very positive. You and I, papa, are not positive at all."

"I think, my dear, that coming off as you did by yourself, was very positive indeed—and the first step in the universal turning upside-down which has ensued."

"I hope you are not sorry I came?"

"No, Constance; I am very glad to have you;" and this was quite true, although he had said to Frances something that sounded very different. Both things were true—both that he wished she had never left her mother; that he wished she might return to her mother, and leave Frances with him as of old; and that he was very glad to have her here.

“If I were to go back, would not everything settle down just as it was before?”

Then he thought of what Frances, taught by the keenness of a personal experience, had said to him a few hours ago. “No,” he said; “nothing can ever be as it was before. We never can go back to what has been, whether the event that has changed it has been happy or sad.”

“Oh, surely sometimes,” said Constance. “That is a dreadful way to talk of anything so trifling as my visit. It could not make any real difference, because all the facts are just the same as they were before.”

To this he made no reply. She had no way, thanks to Frances, of finding out how different the position was. And she went on, after a pause—“Have you settled how she is to go?”

“I have not even thought of that.”

“But, papa, you must think of it. She cannot go unless you manage it for her. Markham heard of those people coming, and that made it quite easy for me. If Markham were here——”

“Heaven forbid!”

“I have always heard you were prejudiced about Markham. I don’t think he is very safe myself. I have warned Frances, whatever she does, not to let herself get into his hands.”

“Frances in Markham’s hands! That is a thing I could not permit for a moment. Your mother may have a right to Frances’ society, but none to throw her into the companionship of——”

“Her brother, papa.”

“Her brother! Her step-brother, if you please—which I think scarcely a relationship at all.”

Waring’s prejudices, when they were roused, were strong. His daughter looked up in amazement at his sudden passion, the frown on his face, and the fire in his eye.

“You forget that I have been brought up with Markham,” she said. “He is *my* brother; and he is a very good brother. There is nothing he will not do for me. I only warned Frances because — because she is different; because——”

“Because—she is a girl who ought not to

breathe the same air with a young reprobate—a young——”

“Papa! you are mistaken. I don’t know what Markham may have been; but he is not a reprobate. It was because Frances does not understand chaff, you know. She would think he was in earnest, and he is never in earnest. She would take him seriously, and nobody takes him seriously. But if you think he is bad, there is nobody who thinks that. He is not bad; he only has ways of thinking——”

“Which I hope my daughters will never share,” said Waring, with a little formality.

Constance raised her head as if to speak, but then stopped, giving him a look which said more than words, and added no more.

In the meantime, Frances had been left alone. She had directed her letter, and left it to be posted. That step was taken, and could no more be thought over. She was glad to have a little of her time to herself, which once had been all to herself. She did not like as yet to broach the subject of her departure to Mariuccia; but she thought it all over very anxiously, trying to find some way which

would take the burden of the household off the shoulders of Constance, who was not used to it. She thought the best thing to do would be to write out a series of *menus*, which Mariuccia might suggest to Constance, or carry out upon her own responsibility, whichever was most practicable; and she resolved that various little offices, which she had herself fulfilled, might be transferred to Domenico without interfering with her father's comfort. All these arrangements, though she turned them over very soberly in her mind, had a bewildering, dizzying effect upon her. She thought that it was as if she were going to die. When she went away out of the narrow enclosure of this world, which she knew, it would be to something so entirely strange to her that it would feel like another life. It would be as if she had died. She would not know anything; the surroundings, the companions, the habits, all would be strange. She would have to leave utterly behind her everything she had ever known. The thought was not melancholy, as is in almost all cases the thought of leaving "the warm precincts of the cheerful day"; it made her heart

swell and rise with an anticipation which was full of excitement and pleasure, but which at the same time had the effect of making her brain swim.

She could not make to herself any picture of the world to which she was going. It would be softer, finer, more luxurious than anything she knew; but that was all. Of her mother, she did try to form some idea. She was acquainted only with mothers who were old. Mrs Durant, who wore a cap, encircling her face, and tied under her chin; and Mrs Gaunt, who had grandchildren who were as old as Frances. Her own mother could not be like either of these; but still she would be old, more or less—would wrap herself up when she went out, would have grey, or even perhaps white hair (which Frances liked in an old lady: Mrs Durant wore a front, and Mrs Gaunt was suspected of dyeing her hair), and would not care to move about more than she could help. She would go out “into Society” beautifully dressed with lace and jewels; and Frances grew more dizzy than ever, trying to imagine herself standing behind this magnificent old figure, like a maid of hon-

our behind a queen. But it was difficult to imagine the details of a picture so completely vague. There was a general sense of splendour and novelty, a vague expectation of something delightful, which it was beyond her power to realise, but no more.

She had roused herself from the vague excitement of these dreams, which were very absorbing, though there was so little solidity in them, with a sudden fear that she was losing all the afternoon, and that it was time to prepare for dinner. She went to the corner of the loggia which commanded the road, to look out for Constance and her father. The road swept along below the Punto, leading to the town; and a smaller path traversing the little height, climbed upward to the platform on which the Palazzo stood. Frances did not at first remark, as in general every villager does, an unfamiliar figure making its way up this path. Her father and sister were not visible, and it was for them she was looking. Presently, however, her eye was caught by the stranger, no doubt an English tourist, with a glass in his eye—a little man, with a soft grey felt hat, which, when he

lifted his head to inspect the irregular structure of the old town, gave him something the air of a moving mushroom. His movements were somewhat irregular, as his eyes were fixed upon the walls, and did not serve to guide his feet, which stumbled continually on the inequalities of the path. His progress began to amuse her, as he came nearer, his head raised, his eyes fixed upon the buildings before him, his person executing a series of undulations like a ship in a storm. He climbed up at last to the height, and coming up to some women who were seated on the stone bench opposite to Frances on the loggia, began to ask them for instructions as to how he was to go.

The little scene amused Frances. The women were knitting, with a little cluster of children about them, scrambling upon the bench or on the dusty pathway at their feet. The stranger took off his big hat and addressed them with few words and many gestures. She heard *casa* and *Inglese*, but nothing else that was comprehensible. The women did their best to understand, and replied volubly. But here the little tourist evidently could not follow. He was

like so many tourist visitors, capable of asking his question, but incapable of understanding the answer given him. Then there arose a shrill little tempest of laughter, in which he joined, and of which Frances herself could not resist the contagion. Perhaps a faint echo from the loggia caught the ear of one of the women, who knew her well, and who immediately pointed her out to the stranger. The little man turned round and made a few steps towards the Palazzo. He took off the mushroom-top of grey felt, and presented to her an ugly, little, vivacious countenance. "I beg you ten thousand pardons," he said; "but if you speak English, as I understand them to say, will you be so very kind as to direct me to the house of Mr Waring? Ah, I am sure you are both English and kind! They tell me he lives near here."

Frances looked down from her height demurely, suppressing the too ready laugh, to listen to this queer little man; but his question took her very much by surprise. Another stranger asking for Mr Waring! But oh, so very different a one from Constance—an odd,

little, ugly man, looking up at her in a curious one-sided attitude, with his glass in his eye. "He lives here," she said.

"What? Where?" He had replaced his mushroom on his head, and he cocked up towards her one ear, the ear upon the opposite side to the eye which wore the glass.

"Here!" cried Frances, pointing to the house, with a laugh which she could not restrain.

The stranger raised his eyebrows so much and so suddenly that his glass fell. "Oh!" he cried—but the biggest O, round as the 'O of Giotto, as the Italians say. He paused there some time, looking at her, his mouth retaining the shape of that exclamation; and then he cast an investigating glance along the wall, and asked, "How am I to get in?"

"Nunziata, show the gentleman the door," cried Frances to one of the women on the bench. She lingered a moment, to look again down the road for her father. It was true that nothing could be so wonderful as what had already happened; but it seemed that surprises were not yet over. Would this be some

one else who had known him, who was arriving full of the tale that had been told, and was a mystery no longer—some “old friend” like Mr Mannering, who would not be satisfied without betraying the harmless hermit, whom some chance had led him to discover? There was some bitterness in Frances’ thoughts. She had not remembered the Mannerings before, in the rush of other things to think of. The fat ruddy couple, so commonplace and so comfortable! Was it all their doing? Were they to blame for everything? for the conclusion of one existence, and the beginning of another? She went in to the drawing-room and sat down there, to be ready to receive the visitor. He could not be so important—that was impossible; there could be no new mystery to record.

When the door opened and Domenico solemnly ushered in the stranger, Frances, although her thoughts were not gay, could scarcely help laughing again. He carried his big grey mushroom-top now in his hand; and the little round head which had been covered with it seemed incomplete without that thatch. Frances felt herself looking from the head to

the hat with a ludicrous sense of this incompleteness. He had a small head, thinly covered with light hair, which seemed to grow in tufts like grass. His eyes twinkled keen, two very bright grey eyes, from the puckers of eyelids which looked old, as if he had got them second-hand. There was a worn and wrinkled look about him altogether, carried out in his dress, and even in his boots, which suggested the same idea. An old man who looked young, or a young man who looked old. She could not make out which he was. He did not bow and hesitate, and announce himself as a friend of her father's, as she expected him to do, but came up to her briskly with a quick step, but a shuffle in his gait.

"I suppose I must introduce myself," he said; "though it is odd that we should need an introduction to each other, you and I. After the first moment, I should have known you anywhere. You are quite like my mother. Frances, isn't it? And I'm Markham, of course, you know."

"Markham!" cried Frances. She had thought she could never be surprised again, after all

that had happened. But she felt herself more astonished than ever now.

“Yes, Markham. You think I am not much to look at, I can see. I am not generally admired at the first glance. Shake hands, Frances. You don’t quite feel like giving me a kiss, I suppose, at the first offset? Never mind. We shall be very good friends, after a while.”

He sat down, drawing a chair close to her. “I am very glad to find you by yourself. I like the looks of you. Where is Con? Taken possession of the governor, and left you alone to keep house, I should suppose?”

“Constance has gone out to walk with papa. I had several things to do.”

“I have not the least doubt of it. That would be the usual distribution of labour, if you remained together. Fan, my mother has sent me to fetch you home.”

Frances drew a little farther away. She gave him a look of vague alarm. The familiarity of the address troubled her. But when she looked at him again, her gravity gave way. He was such a queer, such a very queer little man.

"You may laugh if you like, my dear," he said. "I am used to it. Providence—always the best judge, no doubt—has not given me an awe-inspiring countenance. It is hard upon my mother, who is a pretty woman. But I accept the position, for my part. This is a charming place. You have got a number of nice things. And those little sketches are very tolerable. Who did them? You? Waring, so far as I remember, used to draw very well himself. I am glad you draw; it will give you a little occupation. I like the looks of you, though I don't think you admire me."

"Indeed," said Frances, troubled, "it is because I am so much surprised. Are you really—are you sure you are——"

He gave a little chuckle, which made her start—an odd, comical, single note of laughter, very cordial and very droll, like the little man himself.

"I've got a servant with me," he said, "down at the hotel, who knows that I go by the name of Markham when I'm at home. I don't know if that will satisfy you. But Con, to be sure, knows me, which will be better.

You don't hear any voice of nature saying within your breast, 'This is my long-lost brother?' That's a pity. But by-and-by, you'll see, we'll be very good friends."

"Oh, I didn't mean that I had any doubt. It is so great a surprise—one thing after another."

"Now, answer me one question: Did you know anything about your family before Con came? Ah," he said, catching her alarmed and wondering glance, "I thought not. I have always said so:—he never told you. And it has all burst upon you in a moment, you poor little thing. But you needn't be afraid of us. My mother has her faults; but she is a nice woman. You will like her. And I am very queer to look at, and many people think I have a screw loose. But I'm not bad to live with. Have you settled it with the governor? Has he made many objections? He and I never drew well together. Perhaps you know?"

"He does not speak as if—he liked you. But I don't know anything. I have not been told—much. Please don't ask me things," Frances cried.

"No, I will not. On the contrary, I'll tell

you everything. Con probably would put a spoke in my wheel too. My dear little Fan, don't mind any of them. Give me your little hand. I am neither bad nor good. I am very much what people make me. I am nasty with the nasty sometimes—more shame to me: and disagreeable with the disagreeable. But I am innocent with the innocent," he said with some earnestness; "and that is what you are, unless my eyes deceive me. You need not be afraid of me."

"I am not afraid," said Frances, looking at him. Then she added, after a pause, "Not of you, nor of any one. I have never met any bad people. I don't believe any one would do me harm."

"Nor I," he said with a little fervour, patting her hand with his own. "All the same," he added, after a moment, "it is perhaps wise not to give them the chance. So I've come to fetch you home."

Frances, as she became accustomed to this remarkable new member of her family, began immediately, after her fashion, to think of the material necessities of the case. She could not

start with him at once on the journey ; and in the meantime where should she put him ? The most natural thing seemed to be to withdraw again from the blue room, and take the little one behind, which looked out on the court. That would do, and no one need be any the wiser. She said, with a little hesitation, "I must go now and see about your room."

"Room !" he cried. "Oh no ; there's no occasion for a room. I wouldn't trouble you for the world. I have got rooms at the hotel. I'll not stay even, since daddy's out, to meet him. You can tell him I'm here, and what I came for. If he wants to see me, he can look me up. I am very glad I have seen *you*. I'll write to the mother to-night to say you're quite satisfactory, and a credit to all your belongings ; and I'll come to-morrow to see Con ; and in the meantime, Fan, you must settle when you are to come ; for it is an awkward time for a man to be loafing about here."

He got up as he spoke, and stooping, gave her a serious brotherly kiss upon her forehead. "I hope you and I will be very great friends," he said.

And then he was gone ! Was he a dream only, an imagination ? But he was not the sort of figure that imagination produces. No dream-man could ever be so comical to behold, could ever wear a coat so curiously wrinkled, or those boots, in the curves of which the dust lay as in the inequalities of the dry and much-frequented road.

CHAPTER XV.

THE walk with Constance, though he had set out upon it reluctantly, had done Waring great good. He was comparatively rehabilitated in his own eyes. Between her and him there was no embarrassment, no uneasy consciousness. She had paid him the highest compliment by taking refuge with him, flying to his protection from the tyranny of her mother, and giving him thus a victory as sweet as unexpected over that nearest yet furthest of all connections, that inalienable antagonist in life. He had been painfully put out of *son assiette*, as the French say. Instead of the easy superiority which he had held not only in his own house, but in the limited society about, he had been made to stand at the bar, first by his own child, after-

wards by the old clergyman, for whom he entertained a kindly contempt. Both of these simple wits had called upon him to account for his conduct. It was the most extraordinary turning of the tables that ever had occurred to a man like himself. And though he had spoken the truth when in that moment of melting he had taken his little girl into his arms and bidden her stay with him, he was yet glad now to get away from Frances, to feel himself occupying his proper place with her sister, and to return thus to a more natural state of affairs. The intercourse between him and his child-companion had been closer than ever could, he believed, exist between him and any other human being whatsoever; but it had been rent in twain by all the concealments which he was conscious of, by all the discoveries which circumstances had forced upon her. He could no longer be at his ease with her, or she regard him as of old. The attachment was too deep, the interruption too hard, to be reconcilable with that calm which is necessary to ordinary existence. Constance had restored him to herself by her

pleasant indifference, her easy talk, her unconsciousness of everything that was not usual and natural. He began to think that if Frances were but away—since she wished to go—a new life might begin—a life in which there would be nothing below the surface, no mystery, which is a mistake in ordinary life. It would be difficult, no doubt, for a brilliant creature like Constance to content herself with the humdrum life which suited Frances; and whether she would condescend to look after his comforts, he did not know. But so long as Mariuccia was there, he could not suffer much materially; and she was a very amusing companion, far more so than her sister. As he came back to the Palazzo, he was reconciled to himself.

This comfortable state of mind, however, did not last long. Frances met them at the door with her face full of excitement. “Did you meet him?” she said. “You must have met him. He has not been gone ten minutes.”

“Meet whom? We met no one but the General.”

“I think I know,” cried Constance. “I have been expecting him every day—Markham.”

“He says he has come to fetch me, papa.”

“Markham!” cried Waring. His face clouded over in a moment. It is not easy to get rid of the past. He had accomplished it for a dozen years; and after a very bad moment, he thought he was about to shuffle it off again; but it was evident that in this he was premature. “I will not allow you to go with Markham,” he said. “Don’t say anything more. Your mother ought to have known better. He is not an escort I choose for my daughter.”

“Poor old Markham! he is a very nice escort,” said Constance, in her easy way. “There is no harm in him, papa. But never mind till after dinner, and then we can talk it over. You are ready, Fan? Oh, then I must fly. We have had a delightful walk. I never knew anything about fathers before; they are the most charming companions,” she said, kissing her hand to him as she went away. But this did not mollify the angry man. There rose up before him the recollection of a hundred contests in which Markham’s voice had come in to make everything

worse, or of which Markham's escapades had been the cause.

"I will not see him," he said; "I will not sanction his presence here. You must give up the idea of going altogether, till he is out of the way."

"I think, papa, you must see him."

"Must—there is no *must*. I have not been in the habit of acknowledging compulsion, and be assured that I shall not begin now. You seem to expect that your small affairs are to upset my whole life!"

"I suppose," said Frances, "my affairs are small; but then they are my life too."

She ought to have been subdued into silence by his first objection; but, on the contrary, she met his angry eyes with a look which was deprecating, but not abject, holding her little own. It was a long time since Waring had encountered anything which he could not subdue and put aside out of his path. But, he said to himself—all that long restrained and silent temper which had once reigned and raged within him, springing up again unsubdued—he might have

known! The moment long deferred, yet inevitable, which brought him in contact once more with his wife, could bring nothing with it but pain. Strife breathed from her wherever she appeared. He had never been a match for her and her boy, even at his best; and now that he had forgotten the ways of battle—now that his strength was broken with long quiet, and the sword had fallen from his hand—she had a pull over him now which she had not possessed before. He could have done without both the children a dozen years ago. He was conscious that it was more from self-assertion than from love that he had carried off the little one, who was rather an embarrassment than a pleasure in those days—because he would not let her have everything her own way. But now, Frances was no longer a creature without identity, not a thing to be handed from one to another. He could not free himself of interest in her, of responsibility for her, of feeling his honour and credit implicated in all that concerned her. Ah! that woman knew. She had a hold upon him that she never had before; and the first use she made of it was to insult

him—to send her son, whom he hated, for his daughter, to force him into unwilling intercourse with her family once more.

Frances took the opportunity to steal away while her father gloomily pursued these thoughts. What a change from the tranquillity which nothing disturbed! now one day after another, there was some new thing that stirred up once more the original pain. There was no end to it. The mother's letters at one moment, the brother's arrival at another, and no more quiet whatever could be done, no more peace.

Nevertheless, dinner and the compulsory decorum which surrounds that great daily event, had its usual tranquillising effect. Waring could not shut out from his mind the consciousness that to refuse to see his wife's son, the brother of his own children, was against all the decencies of life. It is easy to say that you will not acknowledge social compulsion, but it is not so easy to carry out that determination. By the time that dinner was over, he had begun to perceive that it was impossible. He took no part, indeed, in the

conversation, lightly maintained, by Constance, about her brother, made short replies even when he was directly addressed, and kept up more or less the lowering aspect with which he had meant to crush Frances. But Frances was not crushed, and Constance was excited and gay. "Let us send for him after dinner," she said. "He is always amusing. There is nothing Markham does not know. I have seen nobody for a fortnight, and no doubt a hundred things have happened. Do send for Markham, Frances. Oh, you must not look at papa. I know papa is not fond of him. Dear! if you think one can be fond of everybody one meets—especially one's connections. Everybody knows that you hate half of them. That makes it piquant. There is nobody you can say such spiteful things to as people whom you belong to, whom you call by their Christian names."

"That is a charming Christian sentiment—entirely suited to the surroundings you have been used to, Con; but not to your sister's."

"Oh, my sister! She has heard plenty of hard things said of that good little Tasie, who

is her chief friend. Frances would not say them herself. She doesn't know how. But her surroundings are not so ignorant. You are not called upon to assume so much virtue, papa."

"I think you forget a little to whom you are speaking," said Waring, with quick anger.

"Papa!" cried Constance, with an astonished look, "I think it is you who forget. We are not in the middle ages. Mamma failed to remember that. I hope you have not forgotten too, or I shall be sorry I came here."

He looked at her with a sudden gleam of rage in his eyes. That temper which had fallen into disuse was no more overcome than when all this trouble began; but he remained silent, putting force upon himself, though he could not quite conceal the struggle. At last he burst into an angry laugh: "You will train me, perhaps, in time to the subjection which is required from the nineteenth-century parent," he said.

"You are charming," said his daughter, with a bow and smile across the table. "There is only this lingering trace of medievalism in respect to Markham. But you know, papa, really a feud

can't exist in these days. Now, answer me yourself; can it? It would subject us all to ridicule. My experience is that people as a rule are *not* fond of each other; but to show it is quite a different thing. Oh no, papa; no one can do that."

She was so certain of what she said, so calm in the enunciation of her dogmas, that he only looked at her and made no other reply. And when Constance appealed to Frances whether Domenico should not be sent to the hotel to call Markham, he avoided the inquiring look which Frances cast at him. "If papa has no objection," she said with hesitation and alarm. "Oh, papa can have no objection," Constance cried; and the message was sent; and Markham came. Frances, frightened, made many attempts to excuse herself; but her father would neither see nor hear the efforts she made. He retired to the bookroom, while the girls entertained their visitor on the loggia; or rather, while he entertained them. Waring heard the voices mingled with laughter, as we all hear the happier intercourse of others when we are ourselves in gloomy opposition, nursing our wrath.

He thought they were all the more lively, all the more gay, because he was displeased. Even Frances. He forgot that he had made up his mind that Frances had better go (as she wished to go), and felt that she was a little monster to take so cordially to the stranger whom she knew he disliked and disapproved. Nevertheless, in spite of this irritation and misery, the little lecture of Constance on what was conventionally necessary had so much effect upon him, that he appeared on the loggia before Markham went away, and conquered himself sufficiently to receive, if not to make much response to the salutations which his wife's son offered. Markham jumped up from his seat with the greatest cordiality, when this tall shadow appeared in the soft darkness. "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you, sir, after all these years. I hope I am not such a nuisance as I was when you knew me before—at the age when all males should be kept out of sight of their seniors, as the sage says."

"What sage was that? Ah! his experience was all at second-hand."

"Not like yours, sir," said Markham. And

then there was a slight pause, and Constance struck in.

“Markham is a great institution to people who don’t get the ‘Morning Post.’ He has told me a heap of things. In a fortnight, when one is not on the spot, it is astonishing what quantities of things happen. In town one gets used to having one’s gossip hot and hot every day.”

“The advantage of abstinence is that you get up such an appetite for your next meal. I had only a few items of news. My mother gave me many messages for you, sir. She hopes you will not object to trust little Frances to my care.”

“I object—to trust my child to any one’s care,” said Waring, quickly.

“I beg your pardon. You intend, then, to take my sister to England yourself,” the stranger said.

It was dark, and their faces were invisible to each other; but the girls looking on saw a momentary swaying of the tall figure towards the smaller one, which suggested something like a blow. Frances had nearly sprung from her seat; but Constance put out her hand and

restrained her. She judged rightly. Passion was strong in Waring's mind. He could, had inclination prevailed, have seized the little man by the coat, and pitched him out into the road below. But bonds were upon him more potent than if they had been made of iron.

"I have no such intention," he said. "I should not have sent her at all. But it seems she wishes to go. I will not interfere with her arrangements. But she must have some time to prepare."

"As long as she likes, sir," said Markham, cheerfully. "A few days more out of the east wind will be delightful to me."

And no more passed between them. Waring strolled about the loggia with his cigarette. Though Frances had made haste to provide a new chair as easy as the other, he had felt himself dislodged, and had not yet settled into a new place; and when he joined them in the evening, he walked about or sat upon the wall, instead of lounging in indolent comfort, as in the old quiet days. On this evening he stood at the corner, looking down upon the lights of the Marina in the distance, and the grey

twinkle of the olives in the clear air of the night. The poor neighbours of the little town were still on the Punto, enjoying the coolness of the evening hours ; and the murmur of their talk rose on one side, a little softened by distance ; while the group on the loggia renewed its conversation close at hand. Waring stood and listened with a contempt which he partially knew to be unjust. But he was sore and bitter, and the ease and gaiety seemed a kind of insult to him, one of many insults which he was of opinion he had received from his wife's son. "Confounded little fool," he said to himself.

But Constance was right in her worldly wisdom. It would make them all ridiculous if he made objections to Markham, if he showed openly his distaste to him. The world was but a small world at Bordighera ; but yet it was not without its power. The interrupted conversation went on with great vigour. He remarked with a certain satisfaction that Frances talked very little ; but Constance and her brother—as he called himself, the puppy !—never paused. There is no such position for seeing the worst of

ordinary conversation. Waring stood looking out blankly upon the bewildering lines of the hills towards the west, with the fresh breeze in his face, and his cigarette only kept alight by a violent puff now and then, listening to the lively chatter. How vacant it was—about this one and that one; about So-and-so's peculiarities; about things not even made clear, which each understood at half a word, which made them laugh. Good heavens! at what? Not at the wit of it, for there was no wit—at some ludicrous image involved, which to the listener was dull, dull as the village chatter on the other side; but more dull, more vapid in its artificial ring. How they echoed each other, chiming in; how they remembered anecdotes to the discredit of their friends; how they ran on in the same circle endlessly, with jests that were without point even to Frances, who sat listening in an eager tension of interest, but could not keep up to the height of the talk, which was all about people she did not know—and still more without point to Waring, who had known, but knew no longer, and who was angry and mortified and

bitter, feeling his supremacy taken from him in his own house, and all his habits shattered : yet knew very well that he could not resist, that to show his dislike would only make him ridiculous ; that he was once more subject to Society, and dare not show his contempt for its bonds.

After a while, he flung his half-finished cigarette over the wall, and stalked away, with a brief, "Excuse me, but I must say good-night." Markham sprang up from his chair ; but his step-father only waved his hand to the little party sitting in the evening darkness, and went away, his footsteps sounding upon the marble floor through the *salone* and the ante-room, closing the doors behind him. There was a little silence as he disappeared.

"Well," said Markham, with a long-drawn breath, "that's over, Con ; and better than might have been expected."

"Better ! Do you call that better ? I should say almost as bad as could be. Why didn't you stand up to him and have it out ?"

"My dear, he always cows me a little," said Markham. "I remember times when I stood

up to him, as you say, with that idiocy of youth in which you are so strong, Con; but I think I generally came off second-best. Our respected papa has a great gift of language when he likes."

"He does not like now, he is too old; he has given up that sort of thing. Ask Frances. She thinks him the mildest of pious fathers."

"If you please," said the little voice of Frances out of the gloom, with a little quiver in it, "I wish you would not speak about papa so, before me. It is perhaps quite right of you, who have no feeling for him, or don't know him very well; but with me it is quite different. Whether you are right or wrong, I cannot have it, please."

"The little thing is quite right, Con," said Markham. "I beg your pardon, little Fan. I have a great respect for papa, though he has none for me. Too old! He is not so old as I am, and a much more estimable member of society. He is not old enough—that is the worst of it—for you and me."

“I am not going to encourage her in her nonsense,” said Constance, “as if one’s father or mother was something sacred, as if they were not just human beings like ourselves. But apart from that, as I have told Frances, I think very well of papa.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was no more said for a day or two about the journey. But that it was to take place, that Markham was waiting till his step-sister was ready, and that Frances was making her preparations to go, nobody any longer attempted to ignore. Waring himself had gone so far in his recognition of the inevitable as to give Frances money to provide for the necessities of the journey. "You will want things," he said. "I don't wish it to be thought that I kept you like a little beggar."

"I am not like a little beggar, papa," cried Frances, with an indignation which scarcely any of the more serious grievances of her life had called forth. She had always supposed him to be pleased with the British neatness, the modest, girlish costumes which she had pro-

cured for herself by instinct, and which made this girl, who knew nothing of England, so characteristically an English girl. This proof of the man's ignorance—which Frances ignorantly supposed to mean entire indifference to her appearance—went to her heart. “And it is impossible to get things here,” she added, with her usual anxious penitence for her impatience.

“You can do it in Paris, then,” he said. “I suppose you have enough of the instincts of your sex to buy clothes in Paris.”

Girls are not fond of hearing of the instincts of their sex. She turned away with a speechless vexation and distress which it pleased him to think rudeness.

“But she keeps the money all the same,” he said to himself.

Thus it became very apparent that the departure of Frances was desirable, and that she could not go too soon. But there were still inevitable delays. Strange! that when love embittered made her stay intolerable, the washerwoman should have compelled it. But to Frances, for the moment, everything in life was strange.

And not the least strange was the way in which Markham, whom she liked, but did not understand—the odd, little, shabby, unlovely personage, who looked like anything in the world but an individual of importance—was received by the little world of Bordighera. At the little church on Sunday, there was a faint stir when he came in, and one lady pointed him out to another as the small audience filed out. The English landlady at the hotel spoke of him continually. Lord Markham was now the authority whom she quoted on all subjects. Even Domenico said “meelord” with a relish. And as for the Durants, their enthusiasm was boundless. Tasie, not yet quite recovered from the excitement of Constance’s arrival, lost her self-control altogether when Markham appeared. It was so good of him to come to church, she said; such an example for the people at the hotels! And so nice to lose so little time in coming to call upon papa. Of course, papa, as the clergyman, would have called upon him as soon as it was known where he was staying. But it was so pretty of Lord Markham to conform to foreign ways and make the first visit.

"We knew it must be your doing, Frances," she said, with grateful delight.

"But, indeed, it was not my doing. It is Constance who makes him come," Frances cried.

Constance, indeed, insisted upon his company everywhere. She took him not only to the Durants, but to the bungalow up among the olive woods, which they found in great excitement, and where the appearance of Lord Markham partially failed of its effect, a greater hero and stranger being there. George Gaunt, the General's youngest son, the chief subject of his mother's talk, the one of her children about whom she always had something to say, had arrived the day before, and in his presence even a living lord sank into a secondary place. Mrs Gaunt had been the first to see the little party coming along by the terraces of the olive woods. She had, long, long ago, formed plans in her imagination of what might ensue when George came home. She ran out to meet them with her hands extended. "Oh Frances, I am so glad to see you! Only fancy what has happened. George has come!"

“I am so glad,” said Frances, who was the first. She was more used to the winding of those terraces, and then she had not so much to talk of as Constance and Markham. Her face lighted up with pleasure. “How happy you must be!” she said, kissing the old lady affectionately. “Is he well?”

“Oh, wonderfully well; so much better than I could have hoped. George, George, where are you? Oh, my dear, I am so anxious that you should meet! I want you to like him,” Mrs Gaunt said.

Almost for the first time there came a sting of pain to Frances’ heart. She had heard a great deal of George Gaunt. She had thought of him more than of any other stranger. She had wondered what he would be like, and smiled to herself at his mother’s too evident anxiety to bring them together, with a slight, not disagreeable flutter of interest in her own consciousness. And now here he was, and she was going away! It seemed a sort of spite of fortune, a tantalising of circumstances; though, to be sure, she did not know whether she should like him, or if Mrs Gaunt’s hopes might

bear any fruit. Still, it was the only outlet her imagination had ever had, and it had amused and given her a pleasant fantastic glimpse now and then into something that might be more exciting than the calm round of every day.

She stood on the little grassy terrace which surrounded the house, looking towards the open door, but not taking any step towards it, waiting for the hero to appear. The house was low and broad, with a veranda round it, planted in the midst of the olive groves, where there was a little clearing, and looking down upon the sea. Frances paused there, with her face towards the house, and saw coming out from under the shadow of the veranda, with a certain awkward celerity, the straight slim figure of the young Indian officer, his mother's hero, and, in a visionary sense, her own. She did not advance—she could not tell why—but waited till he should come up, while his mother turned round, beckoning to him. This was how it was that Constance and Markham arrived upon the scene before the introduction was fully accomplished. Frances held out her hand, and

he took it, coming forward ; but already his eyes had travelled over her head to the other pair arriving, with a look of inquiry and surprise. He let Frances' hand drop as soon as he had touched it, and turned towards the other, who was much more attractive than Frances. Constance, who missed nothing, gave him a glance, and then turned to his mother. "We brought our brother to see you," she said (as Frances had not had presence of mind to do). "Lord Markham, Mrs Gaunt. But we have come at an inappropriate moment, when you are occupied."

"Oh no ! It is so kind of you to come. This is my son George, Miss Waring. He arrived last night. I have so wanted him to meet——" She did not say Frances ; but she looked at the little girl, who was quite eclipsed and in the background, and then hurriedly added, "your—family : whose name he knows, as such friends ! And how kind of Lord Markham to come all this way !"

She was not accustomed to lords, and the mother's mind jumped at once to the vain, but so usual idea, that this lord, who had himself

sought the acquaintance, might be of use to her son. She brought forward George, who was a little dazzled too; and it was not till the party had been swept into the veranda, where the family sat in the evening, that Mrs Gaunt became aware that Frances had followed, the last of the train, and had seated herself on the outskirts of the group, no one paying any heed to her. Even then, she was too much under the influence of the less known visitors to do anything to put this right.

“I am delighted that you think me kind,” said Markham, in answer to the assurances which Mrs Gaunt kept repeating, not knowing what to say. “My step-father is not of that opinion at all. Neither will you be, I fear, when you know my mission. I have come for Frances.”

“For Frances!” she cried, with a little suppressed scream of dismay.

“Ah, I said you would not be of that opinion long,” Markham said.

“Is Frances going away?” said the old General. “I don’t think we can stand that. Eh, George? that is not what your mother

promised you. Frances is all we have got to remind us that we were young once. Waring must hear reason. He must not let her go away."

"Frances is going; but Constance stays," interposed that young lady. General, I hope you will adopt me in her stead."

"That I will," said the old soldier; "that is, I will adopt you in addition, for we cannot give up Frances. Though, if it is only for a short visit, if you pledge yourself to bring her back again, I suppose we will have to give our consent."

"Not I," said Mrs Gaunt under her breath. She whispered to her son, "Go and talk to her. This is not Frances; *that* is Frances," leaning over his shoulder.

George did not mean to shake off her hand; but he made a little impatient movement, and turned the other way to Constance, to whom he made some confused remark.

All the conversation was about Frances; but she took no part in it, nor did any one turn to her to ask her own opinion. She sat on the edge of the veranda, half hidden by the luxuri-

ant growth of a rose which covered one of the pillars, and looked out rather wistfully, it must be allowed, over the grey clouds of olives in the foreground, to the blue of the sea beyond. It was twilight under the shade of the veranda; but outside, a subdued daylight, on the turn towards night. The little talk about her was very flattering, but somehow it did not have the effect it might have had; for though they all spoke of her as of so much importance, they left her out with one consent. Not exactly with one consent. Mrs Gaunt, standing up, looking from one to another, hurt—though causelessly—beyond expression by the careless movement of her newly returned boy, would have gone to Frances, had she not been held by some magnetic attraction which emanated from the others—the lord who might be of use—the young lady, whose careless ease and self-confidence were dazzling to simple people.

Neither the General nor his wife could realise that she was merely Frances' sister, Waring's daughter. She was the sister of Lord Markham. She was on another level altogether from the little girl who had been so pleasant to them

all, and so sweet. They were very sorry that Frances was going away; but the other one required attention, had to be thought of, and put in the chief place. As for Frances, who knew them all so well, she would not mind. And thus even Mrs Gaunt directed her attention to the new-comer.

Frances thought it was all very natural, and exactly what she wished. She was glad, very glad that they should take to Constance; that she should make friends with all the old friends who to herself had been so tender and kind. But there was one thing in which she could not help but feel a little disappointed, disconcerted, cast down. She had looked forward to George. She had thought of this new element in the quiet village life with a pleasant flutter of her heart. It had been natural to think of him as falling more or less to her own share, partly because it would be so in the fitness of things, she being the youngest of all the society—the girl, as he would be the boy; and partly because of his mother's fond talk, which was full of innocent hints of her hopes. That George should come when she was just going away,

was bad enough ; but that they should have met like this, that he should have touched her hand almost without looking at her, that he should not have had the most momentary desire to make acquaintance with Frances, whose name he must have heard so often, that gave her a real pang. To be sure, it was only a pang of the imagination. She had not fallen in love with his photograph, which did not represent an Adonis ; and it was something, half a brother, half a comrade, not (consciously) a lover, for which Frances had looked in him. But yet it gave her a very strange, painful, deserted sensation when she saw him look over her head at Constance, and felt her hand dropped as soon as taken. She smiled a little at herself, when she came to think of it, saying to herself that she knew very well Constance was far more charming, far more pretty than she, and that it was only natural she should take the first place. Frances was ever anxious to yield to her the first place. But she could not help that quiver of involuntary feeling. She was hurt, though it was all so natural. It was natural, too, that she should be hurt, and that

nobody should take any notice—all the most everyday things in the world.

George Gaunt came to the Palazzo next day. He came in the afternoon with his father, to be introduced to Waring; and he came again after dinner—for these neighbours did not entertain each other at the working-day meals, so to speak, but only in light ornamental ways, with cups of tea or black coffee—with both his parents to spend the evening. He was thin and of a slightly greenish tinge in his brownness, by reason of India and the illnesses he had gone through; but his slim figure had a look of power; and he had kind eyes, like his mother's, under the hollows of his brows: not a handsome young man, yet not at all common or ordinary, with a soldier's neatness and upright bearing. To see Markham beside him with his insignificant figure, his little round head tufted with sandy hair, his one-sided look with his glass in his eye, or his ear tilted up on the opposite side, was as good as a sermon upon race and its advantages. For Markham was the fifteenth lord; and the Gaunts were, it was understood, of as good as no family

at all. Captain George from that first evening had neither ear nor eye for any one but Constance. He followed her about shyly wherever she moved ; he stood over her when she sat down. He said little, for he was shy, poor fellow ; yet he did sometimes hazard a remark, which was always subsidiary or responsive to something she had said.

Mrs Gaunt's distress at this subversion of all she had intended was great. She got Frances into a corner of the loggia while the others talked, and thrust upon her a pretty sandalwood box inlaid with ivory, one of those that George had brought from India. "It was always intended for you, dear," she said. "Of course he could not venture to offer it himself."

"But, dear Mrs Gaunt," said Frances, with a low laugh, in which all her little bitterness evaporated, "I don't think he has so much as seen my face. I am sure he would not know me if we met in the road."

"Oh, my dear child," cried poor Mrs Gaunt, "it has been such a disappointment to me. I have just cried my eyes out over it. To think

you should not have taken to each other after all my dreams and hopes."

Frances laughed again; but she did not say that there had been no failure of interest on her side. She said, "I hope he will soon be quite strong and well. You will write and tell me about everybody."

"Indeed I will. Oh Frances, is it possible that you are going so soon? It does not seem natural that you should be going, and that your sister should stay."

"Not very natural," said Frances, with a composure which was less natural still. "But since it is to be, I hope you will see as much of her as you can, dear Mrs Gaunt, and be as kind to her as you have been to me."

"Oh, my dear, there is little doubt that I shall see a great deal of her," said the mother, with a glance towards the other group, of which Constance was the central figure. She was lying back in the big wicker-work chair; with the white hands and arms, which showed out of sleeves shorter than were usual in Bordighera, very visible in the dusk, accompanying her talk by lively gestures. The young captain

stood like a sentinel a little behind her. His mother's glance was half vexation and half pleasure. She thought it was a great thing for a girl to have secured the attentions of her boy, and a very sad thing for the girl who had not secured them. Any doubt that Constance might not be grateful, had not yet entered her thoughts. Frances, though she was so much less experienced, saw the matter in another light.

"You must remember," she said, "that she has been brought up very differently. She has been used to a great deal of admiration, Markham says."

"And now you will come in for that, and she must take what she can get here." Mrs Gaunt's tone when she said this showed that she felt, whoever was the loser, it would not be Constance. Frances shook her head.

"It will be very different with me. And dear Mrs Gaunt, if Constance should not—do as you wish——"

"My dear, I will not interfere. It never does any good when a mother interferes," Mrs Gaunt said hurriedly. Her mind was incapable of pursuing the idea which Frances so timidly

had endeavoured to suggest. And what could the girl do more ?

Next day she went away. Her father, pale and stern, took leave of her in the bookroom with an air of offence and displeasure which went to Frances' heart. "I will not come to the station. You will have, no doubt, everybody at the station. I don't like greetings in the market-places," he said.

"Papa," said Frances, "Mariuccia knows everything. I am sure she will be careful. She says she will not trouble Constance more than is necessary. And I hope——"

"Oh, we shall do very well, I don't doubt."

"I hope you will forgive me, papa, for all I may have done wrong. I hope you will not miss me ; that is, I hope—oh, I hope you will miss me a little, for it breaks my heart when you look at me like that."

"We shall do very well," said Waring, not looking at her at all, "both you and I."

"And you have nothing to say to me, papa ?"

"Nothing—except that I hope you will like your new life and find everything pleasant. Good-bye, my dear; it is time you were going."

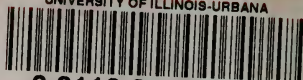
And that was all. Everybody was at the station, it was true, which made it no place for leave-takings; and Frances did not know that he watched the train from the loggia till the white plume of steam disappeared with a roar in the next of those many tunnels that spoil the beautiful Cornice road. Constance walked back in the midst of the Gaunts and Durants, looking, as she always did, the mistress of the situation. But neither did Frances, blotted out in the corner of the carriage, crying behind her veil and her handkerchief, leaving all she knew behind her, understand with what a tug at her heart Constance saw the familiar little ugly face of her brother for the last time at the carriage-window, and turned back to the deadly monotony of the shelter she had sought for herself, with a sense that everything was over, and she herself completely deserted, like a wreck upon a desolate shore.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





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